



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

# The “We can solve it” Narrative

*The Misrepresentation of Climate Change within Contemporary  
Western Discourse*

30 ECTS thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of a *Magister Artium* degree in  
Environmental and Natural Resources

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May 2014

**University of Iceland**

**School of Humanities**

**Environmental Science and Natural Resources**

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**May 2014**



## **Abstract**

Climate change is increasingly affecting life on Earth and its complexities present humans with unprecedented problems and difficulties of conceptualization. Analytical and discursive research of narratives on climate change that are produced within different strata of society can help establish trends in the ontology of climate change. Within such a framework, climate change denial can be situated as not a static phenomena, which would then be seen to be on the wane, faced with the overwhelming scientific consensus on global warming, but rather a manifestation of a complex network of power, ideology and economic interests that is flexible enough to shift the terrain of its discursive engagements. In this paper such a shift in the production of climate change narratives in contemporary discourse is examined.

The climate change discourse of the United States is analyzed as being emblematic of the discursive structure in the industrialized West. Multimedia moving images (MMIs) published on video hosting services are addressed as complex cultural artifacts that communicate specific ideological narratives that function to legitimize another, overarching solution-orientated narrative (the “We can solve it”-narrative). Different manifestations of this narrative are examined within three major institutional domains: the political domain, the corporate domain and the domain of non-profit environmental organizations. The misrepresentations and ideological underpinnings of the “We can solve it”-narrative are explored in conjunction with the strong scientific consensus on climate change, theories within the Environmental Humanities and studies of contemporary neoliberalism.



## Ágrip

Loftslagsbreytingar hafa í síauknum mæli áhrif á lífið á jörðinni. Flókið eðli þeirra birtist í áður óséðum vandmálum og erfiðleikum manna við að meðtaka þær. Greining á frásögnum og orðræðum um loftslagsbreytingar sem framleiddar eru á mismunandi sviðum samfélagsins, geta hjálpað til við að skilgreina helstu tilhneigingar í skilningi manna á efninu. Innan slíks ramma verður afneitun loftslagsbreytinga óstöðugt fyrirbæri. Í stað þess að virðast vera að dvína, frammi fyrir sterkri stöðu vísindalegrar þekkingar á hlýnun jarðar, birtist afneitun hlýnunarinnar sem flókið valdakerfi, hugmyndafræði og samansafn ólíkra fjárhagslegra hagsmuna, nægilega sveigjanleg til að hliðra til framsetningu sinni í orðræðunni. Þessi ritgerð athugar slíka tilfærslu í framleiðslu á frásögnum um loftslagsbreytingar í samtímaorðræðu.

Þá er umræða um loftslagsbreytingar í Bandaríkjunum greind á þeim forsendum að hún endurspegli orðræðu hinna iðnvæddu Vesturlanda. Margmiðlunarmyndir af myndbandavefsíðum eru skoðaðar sem flóknar menningarafurðir. Þær réttlæti, með hugmyndafræðilegum frásögnum, framleiðslu lausnarmiðaðrar frásagnar (“Við getum leyst þetta”-frásögnina). Ólíkar birtingarmyndir þessarar frásagnar verða skoðaðar innan þriggja megin vettvanga stofnana í samfélaginu: á stjórnmálalegum vettvangi, vettvangi fyrirtækja og vettvangi sjálfseignarstofnana. Rangfærslur og hugmyndafræðilegar stoðir “Við getum leyst þetta”-frásagnarinnar eru kannaðar út frá samspili hennar við sterka stöðu vísindalegrar þekkingar á loftslagsbreytingum, kenningum innan umhverfishugvísinda og rannsóknum á nýfrjálshyggju í samtímanum.

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## Introduction

In none of my previous writings have I had so strong a feeling as now that what I am describing is common knowledge and that I am using up paper and ink and, in due course, the compositor's and printer's work and material in order to expound things which are, in fact, self-evident.

Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*

The text is a primary given (reality) and the point of departure for any discipline in the human sciences. It is the aggregate of various kinds of knowledge and methods called philology, linguistics, literary scholarship, scientific scholarship, and so forth. Proceeding from the text, they wander in various directions, grasp various bits of nature, social life, states of mind, and history, and combine them – sometimes with causal, sometimes with semantic ties – and intermix statements with evaluations.

Mikhail Bakhtin. *The Problem of Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences*

Most of us recognize the urge to warn the people on the television or cinema screen about their imminent death in horror films. “Why are you wandering into that creepy house all on your own?” – we ask them, astonished by their failure to discern the obviously dubious circumstances. Yet, in defense of their intelligence, we know something is going to happen, because we are aware that we are watching a horror film, whilst the persons in the film are just part of the story. Hypothetically, if the people in these stories were real and we could tell them that they are actually in a horror film, they could probably keep themselves alive with the help of reason and sense of genre. However, if climate change is a horror movie with extreme weather monsters and demonically possessed sea level rise, there is a person at home – watching at this very moment – speaking very loudly to the characters on the television screen. This person is Science.

Why are we humans not doing all we can to mitigate climate change, considering the strong scientific consensus on the issue? This is the fundamental question underlying this paper, which seeks to construct a specific answer by applying narrative theory to contemporary multimedia utterances on climate change. Furthermore, in the last section of the paper, the results from the narrative analysis are discussed in the context of ideology.

I propose, as a fundamental part of the problematic response to climate change, the existence of a narrative within the contemporary Western discussion on climate change, which I choose to call the “We can solve it”-narrative (WCSI-narrative). I moreover argue that this narrative tends to misrepresent climate change

by overemphasizing human ability to solve the crisis.<sup>1</sup> This will be accomplished by identifying and analyzing the discursive manifestations of the narrative within different cultural fields.

In order to identify trends in the general discussion on climate it is necessary to frame the research effectively. I have chosen to focus on specific discourses within the United States (US), partially because of the polarization of the climate change discussion in the US, providing a comprehensive pool of text with distinctive orientations. The characteristics of the American discourse on climate change are emblematic for the climate change discourse of the West. Furthermore, my final results regarding the production of the WCSI-narrative underpin this choice, whereas I define an economic and political theory derived from the US as its source.

I further demarcate the framing of the research by fixing my sampling of the discussion to the textual material of multimedia moving images (MMIs) accessible on the web. The MMIs were accessed on the video hosting services youtube.com and vimeo.com, but some of them have been broadcasted on television.<sup>2</sup> This form of textual production is optimal for a narrative analysis of such a broad and complex discourse, because its short duration requires the institutions to present the problem of climate change and presumably a response to it in a condensed manner.<sup>3</sup>

I see this paper as literary theory contributing to the interdisciplinary field of environmental humanities, rendering itself as a form of ecocriticism.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, I

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<sup>1</sup> Mankind is already facing the impacts of climate change, and although greenhouse gas emissions would be stopped at this point, the climate would continue to change for many years. Therefore, talking about solving climate change or reversing it, is overstating human capability. However, humans can mitigate and adapt to climate change, and solve many local crises derived from climate change.

<sup>2</sup> Social media and the information mediated through it has a large impact on the contemporary subject in the West (Kavanaugh and others, "Social Media Use by Government: From the Routine to the Critical", *Government Information Quarterly*, 29 (2012), Elsevier, Amsterdam 2012, pp. 480-491), so that at this point in time its influence should not be underestimated as subordinate to television. However, the MMIs that have been broadcasted on television, certainly have a wider and broader reception history than the others.

<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, much of my critique on climate change narratives in this paper is directed at oversimplifications, but such misrepresentations are not the result of a demand for condensation from the discursive form. They are either underthought presentations of climate change, or conscious attempts to frame climate change narrowly for the benefit of some institution.

<sup>4</sup> This particular sub-field of literary criticism has been described thusly: "Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Ecocritics may not be qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology, but they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own 'ecological literacy' as far as possible" (Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, Routledge, London and New York 2012, p. 5), and "[ecocriticism] may also examine representations of nature in government reports, developers' plans, ecological studies, philosophical treatises, wild-life documentaries [...] these representations bring to light the various discourses regarding our natural environment that we have produced since we became

find resonance for my analysis in the 2013 issue of *Diacritics – Climate Change Criticism*, where literary professor Karen Pinkus speaks of climate change as an insurmountable part of our contemporary reality, impacting human thinking in its temporal incomprehensibility.<sup>5</sup> The *Diacritics* issue then goes on to present articles on different complexities of thinking and acting on climate change. English professor Timothy Morton speaks for instance of the strangeness of being able to write “in the shadow of climate change”.<sup>6</sup> This corresponds to Morton’s recent theorization of climate change as a hyperobject, a thing that is nonlocal in both time and space, but ironically, at the same, “envelop[s] us.”<sup>7</sup> Such theorizations of climate change criticism, orientated around the complexity of the phenomenon, are important in order to understand the faulty character I argue is manifested in various simplifications of the concept of climate change.

Equally important is the knowledge that humans have accumulated empirically on climate change, its causes and impacts – in the past, present and future. Detecting the discrepancy between the scientific consensus on climate change and the manner in which scientific knowledge is conveyed constitutes a vital ground for my argumentation, and the method by which narrative misrepresentations can be identified. The scientific consensus on human induced climate change has grown stronger with each IPCC report published, as is evident in the most recent publication.<sup>8</sup> It states that the ever-increasing amount of greenhouse gases in the

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consciously aware of it. And of course ecocritics pay special attention to the hierarchies that operate in these discourses and that establish value systems within them” (Hans Bertens, “Ecocriticism”, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, Routledge, New York 2010, p. 201).

<sup>5</sup> “We might go to an extreme and suggest that whether or not we explicitly take up climate change in our writing (critical, creative, institutional-bureaucratic, or otherwise), climate change takes us up. Writing in the time of climate change—even critical writing engaged with texts from before the widespread extraction of fossil fuels—is necessarily untimely, out of joint with familiar modes of thinking and being, no matter how heterogeneous these may be. As universal subjects under the globalized umbrella of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions, we have come to the threshold of a radical geo-epistemological break, but one that we may have to suppress in order to go on writing” (Karen Pinkus, “From the Editor: Climate Change Criticism”, *Diacritics*, 41/3 (2013), The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2013, p. i.).

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Morton, “She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn: Thinking Through Agrilogistics”, *Diacritics*, 41/3 (2013), The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2013, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota 2013, p. 55. See for instance the chapters on “Nonlocality” (pp. 38-54) and “Temporal Undulation” (pp. 55-68).

<sup>8</sup> The IPCC assessment report referenced above is the fifth in the series. It is a part of the primary materialization of the IPCC’s role to prepare “comprehensive Assessment Reports about the state of scientific, technical and socio-economic knowledge on climate change, its causes, potential impacts and response strategies. The IPCC also produces Special Reports, which are an assessment on a specific issue and Methodology Reports, which provide practical guidelines for the preparation of

atmosphere is „unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years“.<sup>9</sup> This is causing global atmospheric warming, which results in multiple changes in the Earth's ecosystem, impacting current species of the planet severely.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the condition will continue to develop „even if emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> are stopped“, thus, representing „a substantial multi-century climate change commitment created by past, present and future emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>.“<sup>11</sup> And although „[i]t is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century“,<sup>12</sup> mankind has still not reacted to this threat in a sufficient manner, and reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, in order to mitigate climate change.<sup>13</sup>

This inactivity has been defined as *climate change denial* and identified and analyzed within myriad disciplines, where an attempt has been made to locate and understand the nature of this specific form of denial, as well as associating it with certain individual orientations, e.g. political, socio-economic and gender-related.<sup>14</sup> By

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greenhouse gas inventories” (IPCC, “Activities”, *IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, webpage, 2013. Accessed on the 1st of April 2014:

[<http://www.ipcc.ch/activities/activities.shtml>]). The report is divided into three documents, or subreports, one on the physical science basis, another on impacts, adaption and vulnerability and the third on the mitigation of climate change. Also a fourth synthesizing subreport is composed from the information in the previous three. The process behind these publications is extensive, large international groups of scientists are democratically chosen to found working groups for each subreport. These groups then survey the scientific literature on the issue, write a thorough summary, which proceeds to acquire thousands of comments from experts from all over the world that underpin the editing of the reports. In addition to all this, the IPCC produces a summary for policy makers, for each subreport (Ibid).

<sup>9</sup> IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers”, *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*, contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, eds. Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, S. K. Allen, J. Boschung, A. Nauels, Y. Xia, V. Bex and P.M. Midgley, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 2013, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> “While the efforts of international institutions have been quite successful in addressing some environmental problems, most conspicuously the preservation of the stratospheric ozone layer, they have been largely ineffective in brokering effective international responses to others, including climate change [...]” (M.S.Soroos, “Global Institutions and the Environment”, *The Global Environment: Institutions, Law, and Policy*, eds. R.S.Axelrod, S.D. Vandever, and D.L. Downie, CQ Press, Washington D.C. 2011, pp. 43.) See also a 2013 article, opening with: “Why is progress in the climate change regime so painfully slow?” (Maximilian Terhalle and Joanna Depledge, “Great-power Politics, Order Transition, and Climate Governance: Insights from International Relation Theory”, *Climate Policy*, 13/5, Taylor and Francis, London 2013, pp. 572-588).

<sup>14</sup> See for instance: Jeffrey Mazo, “Climate Change: Strategies of Denial”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 55/4, Taylor and Francis, London 2013, pp. 41-49; Riley E. Dunlap, “Climate Change Skepticism and Denial: An Introduction”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57/6, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks 2013, pp. 691-698; Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, “Cool dudes: The denial of climate change among conservative white males in the United States”, *Global Environmental Change*, 21 (2011), Elsevier, Amsterdam 2011, pp. 1163-1172.

identifying the presence of the WCSI-narrative in different parts of society, this paper seeks to indicate that the once dominant climate change denial narrative is being replaced with the WCSI-narrative, a narrative acknowledging climate change, i.e. because of the strengthening of the scientific consensus on climate change, but still misrepresenting the problem.

The human portrayal of climate change involves a narratological function, with narrative here understood as the primary way to convey meaning to individuals. This is grounded on a similarly broad definition of text “understood as production of *signifiante* and not as a philological object, custodian of the Letter.”<sup>15</sup>

An utterance or a symbol is the smallest type of narrative.<sup>16</sup> However, it is misleading to speak of little and big narratives, whereas all narratives seek legitimization from context, that is, other narratives, and thus, it is only a matter of perspective where they start and end. So, although a narrative can be presented in a singular constative utterance, its interpretation always depends on other narratives, which can therefore be defined as a part of the original narrative.

Roland Barthes introduced the idea of a narrative hierarchy to explain this relationship between narratives.<sup>17</sup> His approach is helpful to understand the hierarchical connection that can form between narratives. However, to comprehend the narrative analysis of this paper, it is necessary to realize that when I speak of one narrative, as legitimizing another, the relationship between them is always reciprocal. The dominance that one narrative can have over another’s meaning, defines at the same time the meaning of the dominant narrative.

Furthermore, the idea of a hierarchical relationship between narratives is helpful when explaining the production and therefore, legitimization, of a misleading narrative on climate change. I see this as a twofold process. In order to locate the WCSI-narrative in the contemporary discourse of the Western tradition, I seek to

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<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Struggle with the Angel”, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, New York 1977, p. 126.

<sup>16</sup> “[...] just as every constative sentence is in a way the rough outline of a short narrative” (Roland Barthes, Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, New York 1978, p. 84).

<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”, p. 86.

situate this narrative trend in the context of two legitimizing plateaus based on different historical temporalities.<sup>18</sup>

The narrative analysis carried out in the first three sections is primarily based on a legitimizing plateau with broad temporality, recognized by the modern Western society as deriving from the historical break of the Enlightenment and still present today. This plateau renders the human self-image in Western world to fit the idea of constant human progress. In order to articulate my position I will have recourse to the work of a number of modern cultural theorists and philosophers. The work of French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard will for example prove useful and I employ his notion of “metanarrative” to designate the plateau discussed above,<sup>19</sup>

The last section of the paper discusses common characteristics of different deployments of the WCSI-narrative, in regard to a legitimizing plateau with a more limited temporality, thus changing frequently, and tending to be manifested differently between cultural spheres in the West, generally demarcated by nation states. This plateau renders a more specific ontology of society and my comprehension of it is based on Louis Althusser’s theorization of ideology.<sup>20</sup> At stake is not another metanarrative legitimized by the metanarrative of progress, but a rendering of this metanarrative in a specific way, at a specific time and often in a specific space. Thus, the concept of ideology offers a trajectory into thinking about the way subjects are unconsciously governed by society through specific latent rationality. For instance, how people think about climate change in a specific way, and different perceptions of climate change influence different responses to it.

The concepts metanarrative and ideology therefore overlap in my understanding of them, and although presented as functioning independently in different sections of this paper, they both serve as an underpinning for the argument as a whole. The three sections where ideology is hardly mentioned, present an analysis of three discourses of society. The understanding of the term discourse is

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<sup>18</sup> My use of the concept plateau is derived from the poststructural theory of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2005. First published by the same publisher in 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 1984, p. 32. Lyotard discusses the existence of metanarratives that bring legitimacy to human knowledge in its narrative form. He especially mentions two metanarratives, which are both orientated around the progress of man.

<sup>20</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press, New York 2001, pp 85-126. English translation from 1971. The content of this text is discussed in more detail later in this introduction.



based on Althusser's theorization of the state, and its production of ideology through different ideological state apparatuses, orientated around specific institutions of society. Still, the term itself is obtained from the writings of Althusser's student Michel Foucault.<sup>21</sup> Vice versa, the metanarrative term underlies the discussion of the last section on the rendering of ideology in the WCSI-narrative, whereas the metanarrative of progress is a vital part of the narrative analysis, which provides the results that the last section processes further.

However, the use of these two terms simultaneously is problematic. They do not only belong to different theories, but also ones that stake out positions that are not always entirely in agreement. I resolve this by thinking through the poststructuralist terminology of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Without, however, going so far as to present my research as a rhizome, I portray discursive history not as a linear path on a two dimensional plane but as various narrative strata materialized through different plateaus of legitimization.<sup>22</sup> In this way, I find myself able to use the terms

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<sup>21</sup> "We can now understand the reason for the equivocal meaning of the term *discourse*, which I have used and abused in many different senses: in the most general, and vaguest way, it denoted a group of verbal performances; and by discourse, then, I meant that which was produced (perhaps all that was produced) by the groups of signs. But I also meant a group of acts of formulation, a series of sentences or propositions. Lastly – and it is this meaning that was finally used (together with the first, which served in a provisional capacity) – discourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned to particular modalities of existence" (Michel Foucault, "The Description of Statements", *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, London and New York 2002, p. 120 and p. 121. English translation first published in 1972 by Tavistock Publications Ltd.). Foucault's use of the concept discourse is not consistent, and can both refer to a certain way of using language – from the words you use to how they are legitimized – but it can also quite neutrally refer to the pool of text that a certain institution produces. These versions of the concept are obviously related whereas if a pool of text from a specific institution has specific characteristics, it is possible to refer to these characteristics as this institutions discourse, in the context of others. Here the more practical neutral meaning of discourse as a "group of signs" is used, whereas I use the terms narrative and rhetoric to convey a special way of using language. Primarily because I am identifying a trend in language that is inter-discursive, whereas it can be found within multiple discourses, and it is not obvious in what particular discourse the trend is rooted or even if the trend does derive from a single discourse. I also sometimes speak of climate change discourse in order to group all the signs on climate change together.

<sup>22</sup> A fundamental concept of Deleuze and Guattari's is rhizome, the chaotic non-transcendent root-system of small plants, which they use as a metaphor for their ontology, countering binary logic, ironically though opposing it with the image of a tree or a ordinary root (Deleuze and Guattari, "Introduction: The Rhizome", *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2005, pp. 3-25). I use two terms from their theory, to think through the simultaneous, and converging legitimization of narratives from two relatively independent forces of legitimation. There theorization of a plateau as "a 'region of intensities'", that constitute a rhizome and are therefore "without reference to a transcendent goal," helps me think through the reciprocal connectivity between both plateaus, ideology and metanarrative, without having to depict a particular power relationship between these forces of legitimation (Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy – A Guide and Glossary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2006, p. 126). To deepen this image, I think of narratives as alloplastic strata that are in becoming across both plateaus at the same time. But Deleuze and Guattari define alloplastic stratum

metanarrative and ideology at the same time without them fighting over the territorialization of significance.

Long before Lyotard's theorization of progress metanarratives, men have been aware of the importance of the idea of progress, for humans to comprehend their existence in the modern. Writing in 1920, theologian William Inge referred to the metanarrative of progress as "belief":

The belief in Progress, not as an ideal but as an indisputable fact, not as a task for humanity but as a law of Nature, has been the working faith of the West for about hundred and fifty years.<sup>23</sup>

But what had happened hundred and fifty years before that kindled this belief? The answer is hidden in the phrasing "law of nature", it is the break related to the Enlightenment that marks a start for the legitimizing plateau I posit as the metanarrative of progress. In *The Postmodern Condition* Jean-François Lyotard explains the need for a primal mode of knowledge, narrative knowledge, in the wake of the Enlightenment, and further asserts the need for the idea of progress in the process of legitimation:

The explicit appeal to narrative in the problematic of knowledge is concomitant with the liberation of the bourgeois classes from the traditional authorities. Narrative knowledge makes a resurgence in the West as a way of solving the problem of legitimating the new authorities. [...] The notion of progress is a necessary outgrowth of this. It represents nothing other than the movement by which knowledge is presumed to accumulate – but this movement is extended to the new sociopolitical subject.<sup>24</sup>

For Lyotard the idea of progress is therefore bound to both of the metanarratives he discusses, one concerning the emancipation of man and the other concerning his ability to speculate – also referred to as grand-narratives or master-narratives. He identifies these metanarratives as holding the legitimating agency in modernity, and

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as a "register where the creative production of signs constructs territories" (Bonta and Protevi, p. 51). This explanation is only here to underpin my use of the concepts legitimation, metanarrative, ideology and narrative, rather than to underpin their use in this paper, which will be limited hereafter.

<sup>23</sup> William R. Inge, *The Idea of Progress*, Oxford University Press, London 1920, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Lyotard, p. 30.

further, as being met with incredulity in the postmodern.<sup>25</sup> In this paper I presume that there is a metanarrative of progress that gives legitimacy to utterances at present times in Western society, although, as mentioned before I do not see this as the sole legitimizing force.

Shifting the theoretical discussion to the other force of legitimation – the other plateau – I understand through Louis Althusser's theorization of ideology, which he argues to be “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” and furthermore as having “a material existence.”<sup>26</sup> So ideology can be thought of as a collective perspective on the world that can be found within the minds of the individuals that live in a society, as well as simply being the materialization of society.

The supposed misrepresentations of the climate change denial narrative, as well as the WCSI-narrative, although widely believed and legitimated by the discursive production of society's institutions, can easily be understood when the narratives are defined as a part of “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”

The production of ideology and therefore the WCSI-narrative identified in this paper is in the hands of ideological state apparatuses, which all “contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation.”<sup>27</sup> And I pinpoint the WCSI-narrative in MMIs produced by political institutions, corporations and nonprofit (environmental) organizations, whereas these institutions are all parts of specific ideological state apparatuses in Althusser's state. The state he theorizes it not restricted to the governmental institutions of society, but represents all parts of it, as long as they are producing something with significance (here MMIs) that thus effects how the individuals within society perceive the world, and live in it.<sup>28</sup> However, although I use Althusser here to convey my perspective on the connection between ideology, narrative and specific institutions of society, I prefer speaking of specified discourses within society instead of ideological state

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<sup>25</sup> Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition*, discusses these metanarratives on p. 32 and the incredulity towards metanarratives on p. xxiv.

<sup>26</sup> Althusser, pp. 109 and p. 112.

<sup>27</sup> Althusser, p. 104.

<sup>28</sup> “[...] [T]he state, which is the State *of* the ruling class, is neither public nor private; on the contrary, it is the precondition for any distinction between public or private. The same thing can be said from the starting-point of our State Ideological Apparatuses. It is unimportant whether the institutions in which they are realized are ‘public’ or ‘private’” (Althusser, p. 97).

apparatuses. This is because I find Althusser's terminology too limiting, whereas it presents a highly technical society with accurately demarcated apparatuses that function in a very specific way. By using discourses I side with a more organic depiction of society, where ideology is produced in a more arbitrary way, for instance with two or more discourses overlapping. Thus, I hereafter speak of discourse and I root my understanding of it in Althusser's model of society, and find precedent for my usage, as mentioned before, in the work of his student, Michel Foucault.<sup>29</sup>

Some work has been done within different fields in order to point out ideology's fundamental importance when it comes to understanding the climate change dilemma. Political scientist Justin Kenrick does not mention the term ideology in a "straight-to-the-point" article on the denial manifested in different, seemingly rational, responses to climate change, but he emphasizes the importance of focusing on "the system driving climate change."<sup>30</sup> In addition to "the system" he uses terms like, "the mainstream", "the current paradigm" and "power",<sup>31</sup> and sees this as the major cause of climate change.

Tim Matts' recent PhD thesis argues the fundamental need for ideological analysis of literary texts, asserting the "instrumental and environmentally-damaging orientation of contemporary techno-capitalism."<sup>32</sup> Naomi Klein, in her article "Capitalism vs. the Climate", follows the same trajectory as both Kenrick and Matts, stating ideology's fundamental role in causing climate change, but more importantly, underlining free-market ideology's inability to sufficiently respond to climate change:

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<sup>29</sup> See footnote 21.

<sup>30</sup> Justin Kenrick, "Emerging from the Shadow of Climate Change Denial", *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 12/1, on the web, p. 102. Accessed on the 2nd of April 2014: [<http://www.acme-journal.org/vol12/Kenrick2013.pdf>].

<sup>31</sup> The concept of power can be seen as Foucault's supplement for avoiding using the term ideology, although he uses the concept of ideology to some extent in some of his earlier work, for instance, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Routledge, London and New York 2002. First published in 1966 as *Les mots et les choses* by Editions Gallimar, Paris. However, in a interview in 1976 he discusses the difficulties he has had with the concept of ideology, and although he does not define power as his supplementary concept, the discussion on repression and power, which follows, indicates this. For instance he states how the concept of power can only partially be understood as the act of repression: "If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?" (Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power", *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, The New Press, New York and London 2003, p. 307). An interview conducted in June 1976, published in *Microfisica del potere: interveni politici*, eds. Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, trans. C.Lazzeri, Einaudi, Turin 1977.

<sup>32</sup> Tim Matts, *Violent Signs: Ecocriticism and the Symptom*, PhD Thesis, unpublished, Cardiff University 2011, p. 116. Accessed on the 8th of January 2014: [<http://orca.cf.ac.uk/19520/1/2011MattsTRPhD.pdf>].

It is true that responding to the climate threat requires strong government action at all levels. [...] Here is where the Heartlanders<sup>[33]</sup> [a right-wing thinktank] have good reason to be afraid: arriving at these new systems is going to require shredding the free-market ideology that has dominated the global economy for more than three decades.<sup>34</sup>

The WCSI-narrative identified in this paper with its emphasis on “solutions” seems to contradict Klein’s portrayal of neoliberal ideology’s helplessness when it comes to responding sufficiently to climate change. However, as mentioned above, I argue that the WCSI-narrative is an extension of this helplessness, because of its misrepresentations of climate change. Thus, quite ironically, the fact that neoliberal ideology has difficulties, vis-à-vis the climate crisis, is latent in a solution-orientated optimism. I seek to bring legitimacy to this irony that Slavoj Žižek also pinpointed in his text on the optimistic shift in Western discourse on climate change:

Lately, however, we hear more and more voices enjoining us to be positive about global warming. The pessimistic predictions, so we are told, should be seen a more balanced context. True, climate change will bring increased resource competition, coastal flooding, infrastructure damage from melting permafrost, stresses on animal species and indigenous cultures, all this accompanied by ethnic violence, civil disorder, and local gang rule. But we should also bear in mind that the hitherto hidden treasures of a new continent will be disclosed, its resources will become more accessible, its land more suitable for human habitation. Already in a year or so, cargo ships will be able to take a direct northern route through the Arctic, cutting the consumption of fuel and thereby reducing carbon emissions. Big businesses and state powers are already looking for new economic opportunities, which concern not only (or even primarily) “green industry”, but much more simply the potential for further exploitation of nature opened up by climatic changes.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The Heartland Institute is one of many nonprofit organizations that produce climate change denial, by publishing various material, including podcasts and MMIs, as well as organizing their own international climate conferences promoting what they call climate change skepticism. Climatologist Michael M. Mann, famous for being extensively attacked by climate denial institutions because of his research on climate change, has written a book on his experience and the production of climate change denial. There he discusses institutions like the Heartland Institute: “[T]he Heartland Institute, a group that has been funded by both tobacco (Philip Morris) and fossil fuel (Exxon, Koch, Scaife) interests, has financed a series of one-sided conferences on climate change, featuring a slate of climate change deniers, many with no discernible scientific credentials, and most with financial connections of one sort or another to the fossil fuel industry or groups they fund” (Michael Mann, *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars*, Columbia University Press, New York 2012, p.67).

<sup>34</sup> Naomi Klein, “Capitalism vs. the Climate – What the Right Gets – and the Left Doesn’t – about the Revolutionary Power of Climate Change”, *Nation*, vol. 293, no. 22, Nation Company L.P., New York 2011, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, Verso, London and New York 2011, p. 328.

In order to determine the existence of the overly optimistic WCSI-narrative and identify the progress imperative that drives this specific textual production on climate change – the reproduction of the relations of production, or as Žižek puts it, “the potential for further exploitation of nature” – I analyze MMIs on climate change within three different discourses, produced by three types of institutions, political, corporate and nonprofit environmental.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas, this paper attempts to identify a general shift in the climate change discussion – from climate change denial narratives towards climate change narratives that more specifically address climate change as a problem – it is necessary to define a coherent time frame. Therefore, I narrowed the frame of the research down to MMIs produced after the year 2007, because I see the publication of the fourth IPCC assessment report as a major event in the history of the accumulation of scientific knowledge.<sup>37</sup>

The title assigned to the WCSI-narrative is inspired by the main slogan of the *We Campaign* produced by the *Alliance for Climate Protection*, a nonprofit environmental organization founded by Al Gore, former vice president of the United States, which in 2010 combined with another similar organization also founded by Al Gore, *The Climate Project*, to become *The Climate Reality Project*. In the

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<sup>36</sup> Further research could carry out a more extensive analysis of the WSCI narrative, i.e. looking into more examples of the narratives within the three discourses examined in this paper or within other discourses. I have for instance identified the WSCI narrative within other discourses, such as the educational discourse, in schoolbooks and in published texts of some academic disciplines, and the media discourse.

<sup>37</sup> Previous in this section the most recent establishment of the contemporary scientific consensus on climate change was surveyed from the fifth IPCC assessment report. However, it is necessary to do the same for the scientific consensus at the time that the MMIs analysed in this paper, were produced. “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal” (IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers”, *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis*, contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, eds. Solomon, S., D. Qin, M. Manning, Z. Chen, M. Marquis, K.B. Averyt, M. Tignor and H.L. Miller, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York 2007, p. 5). “Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations” (Ibid, p. 10). “Anthropogenic warming and sea level rise would continue for centuries due to the time scales associated with climate processes and feedbacks, even if greenhouse gas concentrations were to be stabilised” (Ibid, p. 16). “Impacts due to altered frequencies and intensities of extreme weather, climate and sea-level events are very likely to change” (IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers”, *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, eds. M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 17). “Many impacts can be avoided, reduced or delayed by mitigation” (Ibid, p. 20).

commercials produced by the *We Campaign* in 2008 the WCSI-narrative is presented in a direct way with the sentence “we can solve it”. Nevertheless, this dominant narrative in the contemporary Western climate change discourse is not restricted to the direct utterance of these four words. This phrase is only a signifier of all narratives that convey the message that climate change can be solved. In the sections that follow I often rephrase the WCSI-narrative to suit the emphasis within each discourse.

I analyze the portrayal of the narrative within each discourse by examining other narratives that are in a legitimating relationship with the WCSI-narrative. These legitimating narratives disclose the stance of the institution producing the narrative, and represent different aspects of the misrepresentation of climate change that I argue is manifested in the WCSI-narrative.

To compartmentalize my argument and divide the sections into subsections, I analyze narratives that support the WCSI-narrative, by the syntax of the core utterance of the narrative: We can solve it. Considering first the narratives legitimizing the subject of the narrative, the “we”, and then examining the legitimizing narratives orientated around the transitive verb of the verb phrase, the “solve”. And lastly, building on the analysis of the legitimizing narratives, I construct the narrative or narratives of climate change that I determine as manifested in the portrayal of the WCSI-narrative and simultaneously its conveyed misrepresentation of climate change.

## 1. Legitimizing Authority – The Political Discourse

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a strong scientific consensus regarding human induced climate change, making clear the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent an unstable climate for posterity.<sup>38</sup> Despite these facts the emissions increased and a narrative, which denied the existence of climate change, or its seriousness, was produced. This narrative, which was in stark opposition to the scientific consensus, was underpinned by various arguments, or subnarratives, which ranged from complete nonsense to the blatant misrepresentation of scientific knowledge. The latter strategy involved promoting incredulity towards science based on the uncertainty of measurements and predictions, and can be seen as a constitutive factor in the delayed recognition of climate change and its threats.<sup>39</sup> Although, widely distributed, this narrative has been dominant within right-wing US politics, emerging within the Republican Party.<sup>40</sup>

I have examined a large amount of MMIs produced after 2007 by political institutions, and decided to specifically analyze two MMIs that reflect the general characteristics of the discussion on climate change within this discursive domain. Further, in order to establish the shift from a climate change denial narrative to the WCSI-narrative, I choose to examine MMIs portraying persons of authority from both the Democrat Party and the Republican Party. The WCSI-narrative addresses climate change as a fact, and therefore needs to counter the climate change denial narrative to

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<sup>38</sup> “An increasing body of observations gives a collective picture of a warming world and other changes in the climate system” (IPCC, *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis*, contribution of Working Group I to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, eds. Houghton, J.T., Y. Ding, D.J. Griggs, M. Noguer, P.J. van der Linden, X. Dai, K. Maskell, and C.A. Johnson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York 2001, p. 2).

<sup>39</sup> See, Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, Bloomsbury Press, New York 2010, for information on the production of the climate change narrative by a few scientists funded by big corporations. And, Kari Marie Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2011, for information on how this climate change denial narrative is manifested in the public, underlying our everyday behaviour.

<sup>40</sup> See, Chris Mooney, *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science – and Reality*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken 2012, where he structures an argument with the help of cognitive neuroscience: “Still, it is very hard to miss that [...] one group in particular, the hierarchical-individualists – which includes not only Republicans and conservatives but also right-wing authoritarians, who are very hierarchical and religious, and very defensive of their beliefs – not only starts out highly disconnected from scientific reality on climate change, but also becomes even more out of touch with greater scientific literacy and mathematical ability” (p. 50).



acquire legitimacy.<sup>41</sup> The deployment of the WCSI-narrative by a significant Republican Party member, considering his countering of a dominant narrative within his party, demonstrates the generality of the shift I have proposed.

In this section two MMIs produced within the political discourse of the United States are examined. The purpose is to interrogate the manner in which the WCSI-narrative is portrayed within dominant Western political structures. These are, “A Better Way”<sup>42</sup>, a commercial on climate change, produced by John McCain’s 2008 presidential campaign, and “Addressing the threat of Climate Change”<sup>43</sup>, a MMI made to promote Barack Obama’s speech in June 2013, wherein he introduced his plan to respond to climate change.<sup>44</sup>

The McCain election advertisement from 2008 addresses climate change in order to portray the existence of a solution to the problem, which the MMI indicates can be materialized by voting for McCain. The first half of this thirty second clip presents the impact of climate change with footage including numbers indicating price in dollars racing upwards on a fuel dispenser, a first person angle from a supermarket trolley rushing through a store, and depictions of storms, with dramatic military drums pounding underneath. The second half of this campaign-commercial strikes a hopeful tone, shifting McCain’s voice-over into the foreground with bright blows of trumpets, and footage of the candidate, renewable technology and oil pumpjacks. In the tradition of political commercials, it contains the pairing of a male voice-over and a voice-over by the candidate in question, in this case John McCain:

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<sup>41</sup> The WCSI-narrative within the political discourse is hereafter abbreviated as “the political WCSI-narrative” and this format is also used in the other main sections, resulting in the concepts “the corporate WCSI-narrative” and “the nonprofit WCSI-narrative”.

<sup>42</sup> *John McCain 2008*, “A Better Way”, part of John McCain’s presidential campaign 2008, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 11th of May 2008. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuRHRRYHKIY>].

<sup>43</sup> *The White House*, “Addressing the threat of Climate Change”, a multimedia moving image in Youtube.com, published on the website on the 22nd of June 2013. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcL3\\_zzgWeU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcL3_zzgWeU)].

<sup>44</sup> Obama’s speech underpinned his announcement of a Climate Action Plan. He talked for roughly 45 minutes, elaborating on similar things as surface in the promotional MMI. He confesses to the severity of climate change: “[S]cience, accumulated and reviewed over decades, tells us that our planet is changing in ways that will have profound impacts on all of humankind.” (Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on Climate Change”, *The White House*, Office of Press Secretary, on the web, printable version, 2013, p. 2. Accessed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2013: [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/25/remarks-president-climate-change>]). And presents the “fight against climate change” (Ibid, p.4) as “the fight that America can, and will, lead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century [...] in a way that promotes jobs and growth” (Ibid, p.14 and p.15).

Unknown male voice-over:

Our environment in peril. Oil and food prices out of control. Climate change wreaks havoc with deadly weather. One extreme thinks high taxes and crippling regulation is the solution. Another denies the problem even exists. There's a better way. [THERE'S A BETTER WAY]

John McCain voice-over:

I believe climate change is real, 'cause it's not just a greenhouse gas issue it's a national security issue. [IT'S A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE]. We have an obligation to future generation to take action and fix it. [WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO TAKE ACTION AND FIX IT]. I am John McCain and I approve this message.<sup>45</sup>

This “better way” that the MMI states is never explained, curiously enough, its existence indicated as neither extreme nor involving government regulation. The 2013 Obama MMI is over-all laid-back with a high-pitched serene solo piano sounding under the trustful voice of Barack Obama, speaking directly to the viewer, with the Star-Spangled Banner Flag in the background. In between, moderate footage of extreme weather, and pictures of environmental scenery and technology.

Barack Obama:

In my inaugural address I pledged America would respond to the growing threat of climate change for the sake of our children and future generations. This Tuesday, at Georgetown University, I'll lay out my vision, for where I believe we need to go, a national plan to reduce carbon pollution, prepare our country for the impacts of climate change and lead global efforts to fight it. This is a unique challenge but it is one suited to America's strengths. We'll need scientists to design new fuels and farmers to grow them. We'll need engineers to devise new sources of energy and businesses to make and sell them. We'll need workers to build the foundation for a clean energy economy. And we will need all of our citizens to do our part to preserve God's creation for future generations. Our forests and waterways, our croplands and snow capped peaks. There is no single step that can reverse the effects of climate change. But when it comes to the world we leave our children we owe it to them to do what we can so I hope you will share this message with your friends because this is a challenge that affects everyone and we all have a stake in solving it together. I hope to see you Tuesday. Thanks.

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<sup>45</sup> The square brackets represent general text that is portrayed on the screen. Hereafter, indicated in the same way.

The WCSI-narrative produced by Obama's MMI is more definite than McCain's campaign commercial, presenting particular solutions and promoting a "national plan to reduce carbon pollution." This can both indicate a difference in emphasis between the politicians or the strengthening of the WCSI-narrative over the years from 2008 to 2013.

As I argue, the WCSI-narrative generally tends to misrepresent climate change, thus the narrative does not primarily seek legitimation through scientific knowledge or narratives that are legitimated by scientific knowledge, but rather through narratives legitimated by the metanarrative of progress. Therefore, I divide this section into three subsections, with the first two examining the narratives that are the chief legitimizing narratives of the WCSI-narrative in the political discourse. The former examines the narratives orientated around the subject of the WCSI-narrative, the "we", and the latter analyzes narratives concerning the verb-phrase of the narrative, the "solve". The third section can be said to be orientated around the object of the WCSI-narrative, the "it", as a concluding section that interprets the significance of the political WCSI-narrative on climate change.

### **1.1. Nationalistic Narratives – Legitimizing the Political "We"**

By default the subject of the WCSI-narrative is a "we", first person plural, a subject that is said to have the ability to solve climate change. The speaker in these two MMIs is an obvious part of this "we", an incumbent president in one of the MMIs and a presidential candidate in the other. The other part of this "we" is not as obvious but can quite easily be determined to be the nation that the politicians serve, thus constructing a national "we" subject symbolizing the politician and his nation.<sup>46</sup>

"A Better Way" begins with a male voice-over declaring "our environment [to be] in peril" while presenting a realistic animated picture of the Earth and a quick and gradual zoom in, into the atmosphere, ending in clouds rushing by. At this point in the MMI the "we" is not necessarily limited to the American nation, but can indicate all of humanity. However, a voice over by John McCain later in the

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<sup>46</sup> This relationship could of course be examined more accurately. See footnote 47 for elaboration on the possibility of the speaker attempting to talk to a specific group of people within the nation. However, for now, this element does not need further analysis.

commercial speaks directly to the American nation when he states that climate change is “a national security issue”, with his statement being reiterated on screen along with footage of operating oil well pumpjacks (Figure 1.1.).



**Figure 1.1.** A frame from “A Better Way” depicting oil well pumpjacks.

In “Addressing the threat of Climate Change” the “we” also symbolizes Americans, the president and his nation. Obama says that climate change is “a unique challenge [...] suited to America’s strengths”, emphasizing the role of the American “we” in the WCSI-narrative, and pinpointing further this specific American agency by stating that “we need to [...] lead global efforts to fight it.” Thus, in both McCain’s and Obama’s commercials it is obvious that the “we” in the WCSI-narrative they are producing, is their nation, but not the global community. The implied viewer of the MMIs is an American citizen, but does that automatically render the WCSI-narrative as “Americans can solve climate change”? At least there is nothing in either MMI that indicates the will of the subjects to take part in an international regime to mitigate climate change and furthermore there is no trace of concern regarding other parts of the world. If there had been any intention to incorporate America’s responsibility towards the rest of the world, or demonstrate the need for an international approach to the problem, that would not have been difficult to mediate – at the least through imagery.

The misrepresentation of the climate crisis, as a problem that can be solved on a national level, can be related to the political legitimization of the WCSI-narrative. The WCSI-narrative produced in the two political commercials does not seek

legitimization from the scientific consensus, but is rather deployed to maintain the authority of the political institutions, or help them gain power in the case of McCain. So the WCSI-narrative within the political discourse can be seen to be seeking legitimization from, as well as legitimizing, a narrative on the trustworthiness of the political institutions, a narrative that could be expressed as a “You should trust us”-narrative, with the politicians as the speaking subject.

This supposed “You should trust us”-narrative is easier to legitimate with the WCSI-narrative if climate change is framed as a problem that can be solved solely within the nation state, with the agency of the political institution. Furthermore this portrayal of the WCSI-narrative can also find legitimation in nationalistic narratives, rendering solutions to climate change as valid, because they are profitable for the state rather than the global community.

## **1.2. Technology Narratives – Legitimizing Political Solutions**

The production of the nationalistic “we”-narrative, i.e. “Americans can solve climate change” in order to legitimize the supposed “You should trust us”-narrative is vital to the credibility of the technology narratives orientated around particular solutions. These narratives can be found in Obama’s commercial but are only hinted in McCain’s election advertisement.

The technology narratives that are being juggled in McCain’s 2008 commercial are clearly deployed to debunk the climate change denial narrative, but climate change denial was, and still is, a specific right-wing bias. The propagandist character of the MMI, with anti-regulation right-wing slogans accompanied by a lack of detailed explanation of these solutions, can be understood as the result of a right-wing political institution, producing for one the first times a narrative that addresses climate change as a problem, and not wanting to risk being too closely identified with the issue.<sup>47</sup>

The necessary condition for climate change to be accepted as real, from the point of view of the McCain campaign, is for it to be framed as a specific type of

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<sup>47</sup> Here I infer that the implied viewer, or the group of people which identify with the “we”-narrative, is more specified than mentioned before, e.g. people that have formed an attachment to right-wing politics.

political issue, indicating a specific set of solutions. “There’s a better way,” the male voice-over states, and it is not “crippling regulation”, and McCain proceeds stating: “I believe climate change is real, ‘cause it’s not just a greenhouse gas issue, it’s a national security issue.” In this way the commercial directly states that the belief in climate change is not only based on scientific knowledge, symbolized by the effect of greenhouse gases, but also a political issue, a national security issue.

By stating that climate change is not a greenhouse gas issue as much as it is a national security issue, McCain indicates that the need to solve the climate crisis is not only a matter of stabilizing the climate, but also making America energy sufficient, and non-dependent on other nations for energy. One way to both decrease greenhouse gas emissions and make America energy independent would be to use less energy, but that would result in regulations. So McCain seems to be legitimating his climate change narrative by framing it as a WCSI-narrative that indicates the need to find alternative fuel sources or more energy efficient technologies. These solutions are never stated in the commercial, but it insists on the existence of a better way, other than regulation, and talks about taking action and fixing the problem, leaving these technical solutions as the only rational choice. The presence of these technical solutions in McCain’s commercial is not simply my interpretation but stated in the text as footage of a windmill, or wind turbine, accompanies the male voice-over when it intones, “there’s a better way” (Figure 1.2.).



**Figure 1.2.** A frame from “A Better Way” portraying a windmill.

Attempting to legitimate the WCSI-narrative, portrayed in Obama’s advertisement for his climate change speech, Obama also produces technology narratives that rely on

scientists designing new fuels and engineers devising new sources of energy. In the MMI he first establishes a nationalistic “we”-narrative stating that climate change “is a unique challenge but it is one suited to America's strengths”, before he activates a technology narrative, which can be rendered through the common WCSI-subnarrative, “Technology can solve climate change”. This narrative is not only legitimized by a nationalistic narrative but also presented with similar connotations emphasizing the diversely educated public as working towards these technological solutions: “We’ll need scientists [...] engineers [...] workers [...].” This also underpins a “Solving climate change will produce more jobs”-narrative, which Obama deploys in his speech, and is a generally popular narrative within the political discourse on climate change.<sup>48</sup>

There is not a trace of a narrative that urges people to change how they live: encouraging the public to drive less and bicycle more or share things and buy less. On the contrary, the WCSI-narrative, presented in Obama’s MMI, is legitimated by the metanarrative of progress, and its subnarrative on economic growth. The implied viewer of Obama’s message, the American nation, does not receive a message on changing everyday consumption habits, instead it is implied that the system will change around their current behavior, and the montage that goes along with the text, (“We’ll need engineers to devise new sources of energy and businesses to make and sell them. We’ll need workers to build the foundation for a clean energy economy”), strengthens the idea of a minimal change of lifestyle. The MMI presents the viewer with a shot of a static car with wheels spinning, and its hood up, in some kind of scientific test. Then we see into the hood, the engine of the car connected to some wires, followed with footage of a crop yard and the harvesting of it, with agricultural vehicles. The montage continues with a shot of a wind farm and scientists or engineers showing the president something technical (Figure 1.3.).

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<sup>48</sup> See footnote 44 for a corresponding quote from Obama’s speech. And see as an example of this tendency in the climate change discourse, Alex Bowen, ““Green’ growth, ‘green’ jobs and labour markets”, *Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy*, working paper no. 88, *Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment*, working paper no. 76, London School of Economics and Political Science, London 2012. Accessed on the 3rd of April 2014: [<http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/publications/WorkingPapers/Papers/70-79/WP76-green-growth-green-jobs-labour-markets.pdf>].



**Figure 1.3.** Four frames sampled from a montage from “Addressing the threat of Climate Change”.

Obama’s MMI produces a WCSI-narrative that is fundamentally legitimated by technology narratives and nationalistic narratives, which acquire credibility from the metanarrative of progress. Of course these are not narratives of science fiction, they are based on scientific findings – biofuels, solar power and other technical solutions. However, presenting solely these technical solutions as the chief response to climate change does not correspond to the scientific literature, but should be seen as a optimistic political rendering of the scientific knowledge.<sup>49</sup> In this rendering process, the scientific knowledge is simplified and presented to the public by the political institution, hoping to receive validation for the simplified optimistic narrative through the metanarrative of progress. Thus, the production of the political WCSI-narrative portrays a simplified picture of climate change that misrepresents the crisis. The misrepresentation can be explained with the rephrasing of the narrative as a slightly self-contradicting “Climate change is not a problem but a challenge”-narrative, further discussed in the next subsection.

<sup>49</sup> I quote the IPCC report from 2007, the most recent report at the time the MMIs were produced, presenting an optimal diverse and international approach to climate mitigation: “Many options for reducing global GHG emissions through international cooperation exist. There is *high agreement and much evidence* that notable achievements of the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol are the establishment of a global response to climate change, stimulation of an array of national policies, and the creation of an international carbon market and new institutional mechanisms that may provide the foundation for future mitigation efforts. Progress has also been made in addressing adaptation within the UNFCCC and additional international initiatives have been suggested” (IPCC, *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*, contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, eds. Core Writing Team Pachauri, R.K. and Reisinger, A., IPCC, Geneva 2007, p. 18).



### 1.3. Legitimizing the WCSI-narrative within Political Discourse

The “Climate change is not a problem but a challenge”-narrative can be seen as a rendering of the political WCSI-narrative on climate change. However, the legitimization of this climate change narrative within the political arena produces a paradox. Demonstrating climate change as a serious problem, and at the same time, depicting it as something easily solved, is contradictory. And by “easily solved” I also mean referring to the problem as being beneficial, e.g. by promoting jobs.

Both commercials present narratives that convincingly portray the seriousness of climate change, but the production of the dominant WCSI-narrative serves to debunk these alarming stories. McCain’s MMI starts with statements about an “environment in peril, [and] climate change wreak[ing] havoc with deadly weather” but towards the end of the MMI he claims, “we have an obligation to future generations to take action and fix [climate change].” Thus, the message conveyed is that climate change is a serious problem, but we can fix it if we take action.

The rhetoric in the statements on climate change, underpin a faulty perception of the climate crisis, which further grounds the misrepresentation of climate change by the WCSI-narrative.<sup>50</sup> This erroneous perspective is manifested in an objectification of the environment and legitimized by the dualistic understanding of the metanarrative of progress. Humans tend to perceive the world through dualistic thought, understanding concepts through binary oppositions.<sup>51</sup> However, the faultiness of contemplating the world in such a way can be seen in the unstable and relative nature of concepts, the founding argument of poststructuralist thought.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> At last, what I call the conceptual trinity of narrative analysis is complete. I have already explained my understanding and demonstrated my use of the concepts “discourse” and “narrative”. However, a specific way of presenting a narrative – the choice of words, deploying of metaphors, *pars pro toto*, et cetera – I refer to as rhetoric, in a seemingly traditional understanding of the term.

<sup>51</sup> “A very basic mental operation consists in the creation of opposites: some things are edible, others are not, some creatures are dangerous, others are not. [...] For [French anthropologist Claude] Lévi-Strauss, the structure of primitive thinking is binary” (Hans Bertens, “Reading for Form II – French Structuralism 1950-75”, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, Routledge, New York 2010, p. 49).

<sup>52</sup> Poststructuralism, speaking in narratological terms, surfaces as a counter narrative to structuralism, and therefore criticizes one of its core beliefs – extracting significance through binary oppositions. Poststructuralism theorizes the concept of deconstruction that “sets out to deconstruct [binary oppositions], arguing that binary oppositions are a good deal less oppositional than they would seem to be. Within binary oppositions we do not only find an oppositional relationship between the two terms involved, we also find a strange complicity” (Hans Bertens, “The Poststructuralist Revolution: Derrida, Deconstruction, and Postmodernism”, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, Routledge, New York 2010, p. 101).

In the MMIs, the binary opposition man/nature influences the conceptualization of the environment as an object outside of man. In McCain's MMI, both the environment and climate change are manifested as objects for the ingenious mind of man to fix – climate change is causing trouble and the environment is in trouble. The environment and climate change are thus portrayed as things separate from humans. The truth being that the environment is the totality of human reality, and human thus inseparable from it. However, in the MMI's voice-over and footage, there is no attempt to include humans as direct victims of the weather events that the MMI portrays as the impact of climate change. Thus, the MMI further underpins the idea of the environment, or nature, as separate to humans. Moreover, the use of the binary opposition is an attempt to legitimize a narrative of human dominance over nature, when the relation between humans and nature is more complex than one supposedly reigning over the other. But in McCain's MMI, this conceptualization of man separated from his environment, underpins the metaphor of fixing a thing.

McCain's MMI objectifies the problem as something for mankind to fix, just like any other thing of value that man can handle. The statement serving to reflect the stake of humans before climate change, "oil and food prices out of control" that comes after "our environment in peril", further situates man as primarily an entity of civilization, that is market society, opposed to the environment. Furthermore the first frames of the MMI present Earth through an angle from space, portraying Earth as an object man can handle.

In addition to the fixing metaphor, the MMI has clear connotations with the "Consumption can solve climate change"-narrative, which is introduced in the next main section on the corporate WCSI-narrative. For now, it suffices to say that McCain's MMI presents a simplified image of climate change in order to more easily assimilate the the WCSI-narrative, orientated around the idea of fixing the climate, which I argue is fundamentally flawed.

Obama's MMI depicts a slightly more truthful picture of climate change, not by listing in detail the various affects of the phenomenon, but by directly addressing the complexity of the problem: "There is no single step that can reverse the effects of climate change". However, the MMI ends by stating the possibility of solving the crisis: "[...] this is a challenge that affects everyone and we all have a stake in solving it together."

Whilst the “no single step” statement does convey, to some extent, the complexity of the climate crisis, it implies at the same time that the effects of climate change can be reversed, and this idea is further established when Obama claims the solving of the climate crisis to be possible.

These statements by McCain and Obama concerning the possibly imminent solution or reversal of climate change are faulty. But these narratives are produced through the enlightened man’s custom of speaking in harmony with the metanarrative of progress. Such pro-progress narratives can convey a hypothetical solution to a problem, and if it is difficult or impossible to disprove the solution, it stands as true, at least until it is refuted, because of what could be called a progress bias.<sup>53</sup> Confronted with the immense problem of climate change, the political discourse produces narratives conveying the possibility of solving climate change. The truth – which because of this progress bias, and the need for political institutions to legitimate their credibility, seems to be having a hard time surfacing – is that climate change can neither be solved nor can its effects be reversed, not at this point in time.

As mentioned in the introduction, even if mankind would stop all emissions of greenhouse gases at this time, the effects of climate change would still be upon us in the future, and for hundreds of years. There is no way, at this point in time, to assume when the atmosphere of the Earth will be again the same as at pre-industrial times, thus talking about the reversal of the effects of climate change is a grave misrepresentation of the nature of our atmosphere and climatic changes. A narrative legitimized solely by scientific knowledge, but not the hope of man’s progress, would

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<sup>53</sup> Such a progress bias can be defined as the tendency to believe that good things are going to happen rather than bad, because of man’s evident progress. The failure of this deduction is the premise that man gradually progresses, and even assuming that being the truth, it is faulty to generalize progress as something good. John Gray ironically points at this defect of identifying with the progress narrative: “Among the many benefits of faith in progress the most important may be that it prevents too much self-knowledge” (John Gray, *The Silence of Animals: On Progress and Other Modern Myths*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2013, p. 4). Now, regarding the negative aspects of progress Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer have argued the human dominance over nature as a condition for progress. This considered in the context of man’s inducing of climate change and inability to reverse this change, does not serve to maintain progress’s positive image: “At the moment when human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive—social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces, indeed, consciousness itself—become void, and the enthronement of the means as the end, which in late capitalism is taking on the character of overt madness, is already detectable in the earliest history of subjectivity” (Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, eds. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, p. 42 and p. 43).

tell the story of humanity's possibility to mitigate climate change and adapt to a changing global ecosystem. This narrative is present within the political discourse of the West, although it has less significance than the WCSI-narrative at this point. The fact also being that the WCSI-narrative trumps this moderate "We should mitigate and adapt to climate change"-narrative. For instance, this scientifically credible narrative is produced in Obama's MMI, but it is not especially highlighted in any way, making an appearance in the middle of an enumeration. He talks about "prepar[ing] our country for the impacts of climate change". Hopefully, this narrative – that should be, according to scientific knowledge, in the foreground of the discourse on climate change, along with a narrative on minimizing the severity of the problem – obtains more significance in the future.

However, there is yet another flaw to be found in the WCSI-narrative presented within the Western political discourse and exemplified in these two MMIs. Both McCain and Obama talk about the stakes of future generations and our obligation to provide them with a sustainable society, highlighting the responsibility of current generations for the likely suffering of posterity. And the WCSI-narrative serves as an answer to this, conveying the idea that solving climate change corresponds to the act of stabilizing the climate for these subjects of a blurred future. However, this narrative turns a blind eye towards the citizens of the Earth that have already been affected by climate change. If sheltering posterity from the impact of climate change registers as solving the problem, or reversing it, then the producer of the narrative either does not comprehend the present impact of climate change, or does not define the well-being of all parts of humanity as a condition for solving climate change. Hitherto, the majority of those affected live in the less developed part of the world, and are therefore not the speaking subject of the Western discourse, so this flaw in the WCSI-narrative can also be associated with the aforementioned nationalistic legitimizing narratives.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See here, information from the 2007 IPCC report, because that was the most recent report when these MMIs were produced, although the situation has worsened at present times: "New studies confirm that Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents to climate variability and change because of multiple stresses and low adaptive capacity. [...] Taken together, and considering the influence of rapid population growth and urbanisation, the risk of hunger is projected to remain very high in several developing countries [in Asia]. [...] Small islands, whether located in the tropics or higher latitudes, have characteristics which make them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea-level rise and extreme events" (IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers", *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, p. 14 and p. 15).

The political discourse of the West on climate change produces a WCSI-narrative as illustrated in the representation of the climate crisis in these two MMIs produced by two significant political institutions of Western society, the two opposing political parties within the American political arena. Considering scientific knowledge as a standard of truth, it is evident that the rendering of the WCSI-narrative within this discourse produces misrepresentations of climate change. These misrepresentations are depicted in different ways, supported by different narratives, although the demand for the portrayal of man's progress seems to be the fundamental drive of their production, instead of a drive for mediating the scientific consensus. To pinpoint the misrepresentation: the political WCSI-narrative portrays a simplified picture of climate change, which results in an overly optimistic narrative on the possibility of tackling the crisis, both by overestimating the power of a single nation state and man's general control over nature.

## 2. Legitimizing Consumption – The Corporate Discourse

Moreover, avarice and the blind lust of distinction, which drive wretched men to transgress the bounds of law, and sometimes by sharing and scheming crime to strive night and day with exceeding toil to climb the pinnacle of power, these sores of life in no small degree are fed by the fear of death.

Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura*

Generally, the discursive production of corporate institutions is more specific than the discourse of others, such as political institutions, educational institutions and the media. Corporations can be expected to produce narratives about their products and services, or narratives that can help increase demand for their commodities or raise their exchange value. For instance, some companies manufacture products and offer services directly based on the contemporary ecological crisis. These corporations are founded on the idea of building a society of sustainable development, e.g. renewable energy companies and recycling companies.<sup>55</sup> One of two commercials analyzed in this section is from such a company, *IDEO*, an international design firm and innovation consultancy that “may be the most influential product-design company in the world.”<sup>56</sup> And it has specifically sought to design structures and inspire innovation in order to construct a more energy-efficient society. “Our invitation to you” is a commercial produced by *IDEO*, promoting their new website project *LivingClimateChange.com* and at the same time, the firm and its policy.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The concept of sustainable development is generally traced back to *Our Common Future* a report from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and commonly referred to as the Brundtland report whereas Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway, was the chair of the WCED at the time. The report defines it so: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, on the web, the United Nations, 1987. Accessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2014: [[http://conspect.nl/pdf/Our\\_Common\\_Future-Brundtland\\_Report\\_1987.pdf](http://conspect.nl/pdf/Our_Common_Future-Brundtland_Report_1987.pdf)]). Sustainable development has further been defined as the sustaining of three spheres of society, the environmental, the social and the economical.

<sup>56</sup> US television newsmagazine program *60 Minutes* did an article on the founder of *IDEO*, David Kelley, referring to *IDEO* as a “Silicon Valley global design firm” and as a company that has “created thousands of breakthrough inventions, including the first computer mouse for Apple [...]. *IDEO* may be the most influential product-design company in the world” (Charlie Rose, “How to design breakthrough inventions”, *60 Minutes*, on the web, published on the 6th of January 2013. Accessed on the 1st of May 2014: [<http://www.cbsnews.com/MMIs/how-to-design-breakthrough-inventions-50138327/>]).

<sup>57</sup> *IDEO*, “Our invitation to you”, a part of the project *Living Climate Change*, a multimedia moving image on Vimeo.com, published on the website on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2009. Accessed on the 8th of March 2014: [<http://vimeo.com/6720824>].

This nearly two minute long MMI features Tim Brown, the CEO of *IDEO*, addressing the viewer directly, until, all of a sudden, whilst speaking, he swiftly transforms into a realistic animation version of himself. The MMI proceeds with an animation of various design solutions – along with upbeat music and anxious violins surfacing from time to time – ending like it started with a non-animated appearance of the CEO. This is the CEO’s speech that stretches over the entire MMI:

CEO of *IDEO*:

Design has a role to play in addressing the big challenges we face. [Tim Brown from *IDEO*]. As design thinkers we can shape the conversation by asking good questions and then bring them to life by exploring possible solutions, in an optimistic and real world way. Climate change is of course one of those big challenges. Countries are moving towards reducing carbon emissions by as much as 80% by 2050. That’s a massive change. How do we deal with it? One way is to rely on the policy makers and wait for change to come to us. Another way is for all of us to participate in imagining what life would be like in 20 or 30 years. Which behaviors will change? And which will be preserved? [What’s the future of the farm?] – [on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor?] – [What’s life like when it’s powered by play?] By starting with the human experience we begin to point towards new possibilities and move the conversation away from what we have to give up and toward what we will create. *Living Climate Change* is a place where we hope to explore the future through design thinking. What is Living Climate Change to you? What questions do you want to ask? What possibilities do you want to explore? No doom and gloom. No political agenda. This is a place where we can share our best thoughts and ideas. Help us expand the conversation. [LivingClimateChange.com].

However, although this narrative builds directly on the operation of *IDEO*, it could be defined as an act of conveying *IDEO*’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), especially whereas *IDEO* does not solely work on environmental issues. A broad definition of CSR defines it as “the practice of incorporating stakeholder and shareholder interests in firm decision making, with an eye to increasing societal and shareholder value.”<sup>58</sup> In the context of climate change, CSR is thus the practice of developing methods for the company to take part in dealing with the climate crisis, with the aim of increasing value for both the owners of the company and the public. An important condition for calling actions CSR is that the firm is “improv[ing] their

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<sup>58</sup> David Antony Detomasi, “The Political Roots of Corporate Social Responsibility”, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 82 (2008), Springer, Berlin 2008, p. 807.

environmental performance beyond what is required by law [...].”<sup>59</sup> The demand on firms to develop plans for CSR is increasing and firms that do so tend to produce a narrative concerning their responsibility.<sup>60</sup> Of course, this narrative can be seen to chiefly serve the economic sustainability of the company, as manifested in the need to make the stakeholder, the public, perceive the firm’s CSR.<sup>61</sup>

At present CSR often manifests itself in the form of environmental strategies or environmental policies that companies develop, independently from the question of whether their production impacts the environment.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, narratives on the responsibility of corporations are popular among companies that sell products or offer services that may risk the stability of the environment. For instance, fossil fuel companies profiting from activity that produces carbon emissions, are prone to develop extensive environmental policies and strategies, which they often firmly present in their promotional material.<sup>63</sup> In such cases, CSR has been criticized for being merely a marketing trick, or “window dressing”.<sup>64</sup> The other commercial examined in this section, can be considered to portray a company’s CSR. It is a car commercial by *General Motors (GM)*, featuring electric and energy-efficient *Chevrolet* vehicles, presented as alternative choices to a traditional automobile, fueled by gasoline or oil, thus simultaneously producing a narrative on climate change. Furthermore the commercial, titled “Chevrolet Spaceship Earth”, presents *Chevrolet*’s additional measures to reduce carbon emissions, an act that corresponds with the definition of CSR.<sup>65</sup>

Starting in space, looking towards Earth, this minute long commercial proceeds by taking the viewer on a third-person angled cruise, through natural scenery

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<sup>59</sup> Nathaniel O. Keohane and Sheila M. Olmstead, *Markets and the Environment*, Island Press, Washington D.C. 2007, p. 231.

<sup>60</sup> Detomasi, p. 807.

<sup>61</sup> Roberta Costa and Tamara Menichini, “A Multidimensional Approach for CSR assessment: The Importance of the Stakeholder Perception”, *Expert Systems with Applications*, 40/1, Elsevier, Amsterdam 2013, pp. 150-161.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew J. Hoffmann, *Competitive Environmental Strategy: A Guide to the Changing Business Landscape*, Island Press, Washington D.C. 2000, p. 9 and p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> See for instance the first link on the left on Shell’s website, Shell Global, “Environment and Society”, on the web, 2014. Accessed on the 1st of May 2014: [<http://www.shell.com/global/environment-society.html>].

<sup>64</sup> Regine Barth and Franziska Wolff, “Standardized CSR and Climate Performane: why is Shell willing, but Hydro reluctant?”, *Corporate Social Responsibility in Europe: Rhetoric and Realities*, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., Cheltenham 2009, p. 151.

<sup>65</sup> Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, “Chevrolet Spaceship Earth”, for *Chevrolet*, all rights reserved to *General Motors*, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 16th of February 2011. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0rHPu2d8xA>].



and wind farms, finally arriving at the *Chevrolet* logo situated at the front of the car. The music in the MMI presents a cheerful piano chatting with an acoustic guitar, while a soothing male voice-over speaks to the viewer:

Unknown male voice-over:

Its been called spaceship Earth. Not a big place, but it is our place, and we are learning that what happens in one part of it, affects all of us. We are *Chevrolet* and with the all new plug-in Volt and other energy saving vehicles, like the brand new Cruze, we are helping reduce emissions in the air we all breathe, and we are not stopping there. Starting today when you buy a *Chevrolet* we will invest in renewable energy, energy efficiency and tree planting programs across America. Over the next few years these initiatives will reduce carbon emission by up to 8 million metric tons. That is like planting a forest the size of Yellowstone. Is it enough? No. But it's a start. Because the true conservationist knows that the world is not given to us by our fathers and mothers, it is borrowed from our children. Its why today, tomorrow and on into a better future, we can proudly say: Chevy Runs Deep. [Chevy Runs Deep] – [Learn more at Chevy.com].

It has been revealed time and again that the climate change denial narrative is promulgated chiefly by think tanks funded by the fossil fuel and automobile industry.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, identifying a WCSI-narrative – specifically addressing climate change as a threat – produced by such companies indicates a broad discursive consensus regarding the WCSI-narrative. Furthermore, there is reason to speculate about the real incentive behind the production of the WCSI-narrative, when the corporations presenting the solution have had an interest in funding the production of the climate change denial narratives in the past.

As in the previous section I first examine the subject, the “we”, produced in the rendering of the WCSI-narrative within the corporate discourse of Western society, and then the narratives orientated around the “solve”, to shed light on the legitimating forces behind the corporate WCSI-narrative. In the last subsection I discuss the misrepresentation of climate change orientated around the “it” within the corporate WCSI-narrative.

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<sup>66</sup> See footnotes 33 and 39 on Michael M. Mann’s book *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars* and a book by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*.

## 2.1. Commodity Fetishizing Narratives – Legitimizing the Corporate “We”

The subject of the “we” within in the corporate discourse is significantly different from the “we” within the political discourse. Instead of being orientated around a single speaker and the people of his nation, the “we” in the corporate WCSI-narrative signifies the company, the brand, and even the commodity related to it. In both commercials the viewer gets a chance to be a part of the subject, as a part of humanity, but is excluded from the corporate subject in the utterances that present the WCSI-narrative. However, this exclusion does not have to be permanent. Both commercials convey the message that the viewer can be a part of this subject, by buying the commodity promoted. If considered in the context of Karl Marx’s theorization of commodity fetishism, the commodity presented in both commercials becomes an objectification of the idea of solving the climate crisis. Thus, by buying the commodity advertised in the commercials the viewer gets a chance to be a part of the subject, the “we”, in the WCSI-narrative. So, the intrinsic value of feeling like being an actor in solving a global crisis becomes objectified in the commodity, which of course produces a gigantic discrepancy between the use-value of the product and its exchange value.<sup>67</sup>

Such a manipulation of the viewer of a commercial seems unethical, but such rhetorical tactics are most certainly common practice. .

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<sup>67</sup> Exchange value is the value that a commodity acquires in context to other commodities, and thus, can represent how an individual evaluates a commodity, seeing it as having the value of a fracture or multiplicity of another commodity. Use-value on the other hand represents the usefulness of the commodity. Nevertheless, commodities can have the same use value but different exchange value. Using the *Chevrolet* commercial as an example, the car has a relatively similar use-value as a lot of other cars that can be much cheaper or much more expensive – they all can be driven and they probably have other typical car-like features, like a radio. By relating the act of solving climate change with the purchasing of the car, it still has the same use value, but the consumer is likely to attach a higher exchange value to it, in his mind. “The mystical character of commodities” is to be found in this flickering exchange value, expressed by the consumer, grounded on his fetishization of the commodity, based on his sense for the amount of human labor that has brought it to being. However, how can a viewer of the *Chevrolet* commercial fetishize the labor behind building a vehicle that helps solve the climate crisis? How can you fetishize the labor of saving the world? It sounds absurd, but the car will presumably be fetishized by some, or many, viewers that do not think through the great dimension of the climate crisis while watching the commercial. Unfortunately however, it is not absurd, or even unlikely, considering how accustomed we are to receiving commercials without thinking about them. See quote from *Ways of Seeing* and discussion, in the proceeding text and for more on commodities and commodity fetishism, see Karl Marx, “Chapter 1: Commodities”, *Capital A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, Book One: The Process of Production of Capital, Part 1: Commodities and Money, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. by Frederick Engels, transcribed, Zodiac, Hinrich Kuhls, Allan Thurrott, Bill McDorman, Bert Schultz and Martha Gimenez (1995-1996), proofed and corrected by Andy Blunden and Chris Clayton (2008), Mark Harris (2010), Progress Publishers, Moscow 2014, pp. 26-58.

We are now so accustomed to being addressed by these images that we scarcely notice their total impact. A person may notice a particular image or piece of information because it corresponds to some particular interest he has. But we accept the total system of publicity images as we accept an element of climate. [...] Publicity is usually explained and justified as a competitive medium, which ultimately benefits the public (the consumer) and the most efficient manufacturers – and thus the national economy.<sup>68</sup>

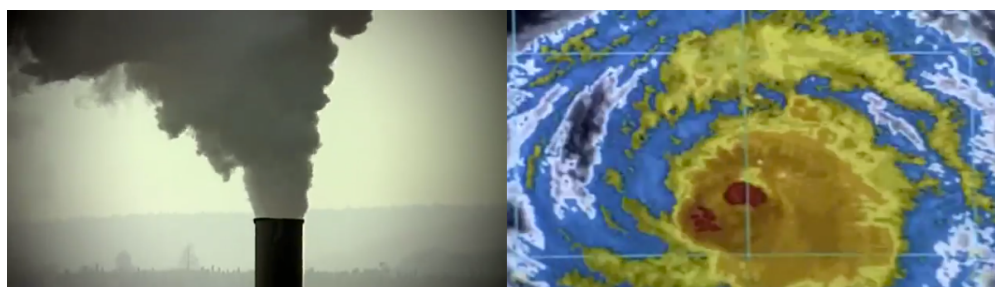
However, because viewers of commercials can register information from them, without being consciously absorbing their signifying production, it is important to detect when they are misrepresenting issues, which need to be correctly understood by the public. For this paper it should be noted that the effect discussed could just as well be a part of the non-corporate discourses examined, whereas the form of presentation analyzed, the MMI, has a commercial-like presence, even in the instances when they are not actual commercials. Nevertheless, the commercials within the corporate discourse have this distinctive feature of underpinning commodity fetishization. But legitimating the subject of the WCSI-narrative in an attempt to establish a particular fetishizing relationship with the commodity, is problematic when it comes to portraying a scientifically legitimized image of climate change, further discussed in section 2.2.

The *GM* commercial begins with a male voice-over that aligns itself with humanity as a whole in a big global “we”, (“[...] spaceship Earth. [...] It is *our* place, and *we* are learning that what happens in one part of it, affects all of *us*”). The “we” is presented as humanity, the people living on Earth. This global subject is learning that the emissions of greenhouse gases, because of human activity in specific localities of the Earth, are the main cause of climate change, which affects Earth’s ecosystem as a whole.. This interpretation of the voice-over is constructed by reading the footage accompanying the spoken text. The footage starts by depicting a single industrial chimney emitting gases, followed by a picture of a cyclone; the first picture refers to “what happens in one part of [the Earth]” and the latter one references the weather that “affects all of us” (Figure 2.1). This is an allusion to climate change, or *the* allusion to climate change, because it is the most direct one deployed in the commercial. The language orientated philological materialization of the concept, as

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<sup>68</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, The British Broadcasting Corporation, London 1972, p. 130 and p. 131.

the signifier “climate change”, is never presented, further discussed in section 2.3. Thus, this global “we” in the beginning of the commercial, symbolizing humanity, mainly serves to legitimate the phenomena of climate change, and is important as such for the production of the WCSI-narrative although it is not exactly the “we” that is the subject of the WCSI-narrative in the *GM* commercial.



**Figure 2.1.** Frames from “Chevrolet Spaceship Earth” clearly referring to man-induced climate change.

The subject is swiftly shifted: “we are *Chevrolet*”, the voice-over says, and therefore transforms the global “we” into the subject of the *Chevrolet* corporation, or at the most, the relatively small group of people that produces *Chevrolet* cars. And it is this “we” that is the chief subject of the WCSI-narrative produced in the commercial. So, the commercial works with a bifurcated “we” – a public “we” and a private “we”. And the public “we” is used to symbolize the problem, whilst the private *Chevrolet* “we” has agency to solve the climate crisis. The difference between these subjects is clear in the text of the voice-over, when the private “we” is presented as “helping reduce emissions in the air we all breathe, and we are not stopping there.” There is no need for the “we” that is breathing all the air that the other “we” is cleaning, to despair because of not being able to participate in solving the climate crisis, the voice-over continues and declares: “Starting today, when you buy a *Chevrolet* we will invest in renewable energy, energy efficiency and tree planting programs across America.” Thus, the viewer of the commercial, the public “we” presented as increasingly recognizing climate change in the beginning, can, by buying a *Chevrolet* have a share in this blurred *Chevrolet* “we” and be a part of the WCSI-narrative. Therefore, in the end, the subject of this “we” can signify both the *Chevrolet* brand and the consumer that picks a *Chevrolet* as his or her automobile.

The *IDEO* commercial produces a similar “we”-narrative, based on the relationship between producer and consumer, legitimating its primary production, the

WCSI-narrative. However, its status as a corporate institution is not as definite in the commercial, as it is not promoting a specific commodity, again understood via Marx as a product with exchange value. The commercial presents the vision of the design firm *IDEO* that also functions as a innovation consultancy, by promoting its new website project *LivingClimateChange.com* where the public can participate in discussions on responding to the challenges of climate change. Although the website has the formal status of the product being advertised in the commercial, it is free to use and thus not a commodity as understood in traditional economics. The discourse therefore resembles the discourse of a nonprofit organization, but it is necessary to be conscious of its nature as a commercial produced by a corporation, a design firm and consulting agency. The *IDEO* brand itself, advertised in the commercial, signifies the commodity the corporation produces, the knowledge it can offer and mediate to customers via designs or consultancy. And the knowledge produced through discussions on the new website can also acquire exchange value for the company.

As in the previous MMI, the *IDEO* commercial opens with a “we” that signifies a much bigger group of people, than the WCSI-narrative, produced by the end of the commercial, generates as its chief subject (“Design has a role to play in addressing the big challenges we face.”). This first “we” can range from being a specific public audience to the global public, mankind vis-à-vis climate change, but the sentence that follows dismisses this interpretation of the “we”, by defining it as design thinkers, i.e. the people working for *IDEO*. The viewer is therefore excluded from the subject of the WCSI-narrative that the MMI goes on to produce. Similar to the *GM* commercial, this is done in order to present the consumer with the opportunity of becoming a part of the exclusive subject of the brand, and simultaneously a part of the WCSI-narrative. It is therefore in the interest of both companies to produce a convincing WCSI-narrative to increase the likelihood of the viewer to desire becoming a part of the narrative, by consuming the commodity promoted.

## **2.2. Technological Consumption Narratives – Legitimizing Corporate Solutions**

The transitive verb found in the symbolic core utterance of the WCSI-narrative, the “solve”, is legitimated with narratives on solutions to climate crisis. As discussed in the subsection on technology narratives in political discourse, talking about solving

climate change is fundamentally misleading because it is a problem that is already affecting humanity and will continue to do so for hundreds of years. However, it is possible to use the word solution in a truthful way regarding climate change in the context of adapting to, or preventing, specific problems of climatic changes. Thus, solving climate change in the sense of minimizing the impact of climate change. I am pointing to this because the commercials in this section produce a WCSI-narrative that could be interpreted as attempting to present a more moderate version of the narrative, resembling this minimizing-climate-change interpretation of solving climate change. For instance, the *GM* commercial states that the solutions it presents are “not enough”, but they are “a start”, and the *IDEO* commercial speaks of “deal[ing] with [reducing emissions]”.

A scientifically credible narrative on climate change would explain the complexity of climate change and emphasize the need for both mitigation and adaption in response to this threat. Both MMIs examined as part of the political discourse failed in presenting the complexity of climate change, instead simplifying the crisis to something that can be solved, fixed, or reversed, and primarily speaking in the context of mitigation. The two commercials in this section produce a similar misleading WCSI-narrative and legitimize it with narratives of technology.

The *GM* commercial begins with an allusion to a metaphor that has been used by environmentalists to emphasize the need to sustain the world we live in, as “spaceship Earth”,<sup>69</sup> whereas it is a closed system and little hope of survival outside of it, if the system fails. In this way the commercial seeks to legitimate its environmental narrative that addresses climate change, by juxtaposing it with the scientifically validated narrative of environmentalism. More importantly it presents a metaphor for

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<sup>69</sup> The metaphor is generally traced to the 1966 speech, and later article, by economist Kenneth E. Boulding: “For the sake of picturesqueness, I am tempted to call the open economy the “cowboy economy”, the cowboy being symbolic of the illimitable plains and also associated with reckless, exploitative, romantic, and violent behavior, which is characteristic of open societies. The closed economy of the future might similarly be called the “spaceman” economy, in which the earth has become a single spaceship, without unlimited reservoirs of anything, either for extraction or for pollution, and in which, therefore, man must find his place in a cyclical ecological system which is capable of continuous reproduction of material form even though it cannot escape having inputs of energy. The difference between the two types of economy becomes most apparent in the attitude towards consumption” (Kenneth E. Boulding, “The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth”, on the web, Boston University, p. 7 and p. 8. Accessed on the 1st of May 2014: [[http://arachnid.biosci.utexas.edu/courses/THOC/Readings/Boulding\\_SpaceshipEarth.pdf](http://arachnid.biosci.utexas.edu/courses/THOC/Readings/Boulding_SpaceshipEarth.pdf)]). First published in *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy*, ed. H. Jarrett, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1966, pp. 3-14).

Earth that, although it has been used in environmentalist context, can also suit the technology narratives the commercial produces, in order to portray a solution to the climate crisis. A spaceship can be controlled and repaired by humans, by technological means. The metanarrative of progress underpins this metaphor, which as discussed in the section on political discourse legitimates the idea of human dominance over nature via dualistic thought. Furthermore, the movement of the camera in this commercial also supports the idea of man's control over his environment, with fast and smooth movements, accompanied with shots from a high angle, gliding mechanically over the scenery (Figure 2.2).

The commercial goes on to establishing climate change, as previously discussed, and proceeds to present technology narratives with *Chevrolet* as a subject:

We are *Chevrolet* and with the all new plug-in Volt and other energy saving vehicles, like the brand new Cruze, we are helping reduce emissions in the air we all breathe [...]

The narratives presented in this male voice-over, on top of a montage of the vehicles mentioned, either plugged into electricity or cruising through a natural environment, can be legitimated with scientific knowledge. An electric or a hybrid car can help in reducing emissions. As the MMI continues, the metanarrative of progress shines through a metaphor of never-ending motion, when the commercial makes a run-up to the next technology narrative,

[...] and we are not stopping there. Starting today when you buy a *Chevrolet* we will invest in renewable energy, energy efficiency and tree planting programs across America. Over the next few years these initiatives will reduce carbon emission by up to 8 million metric tons. That is like planting a forest the size of Yellowstone.

Here the commercial presents a new way to reduce carbon emissions. If the consumer purchases a *Chevrolet*, the corporation pledges to invest in activities that aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The technology narrative is imbued with a resonance that is reminiscent of the political commercials discussed earlier through its imagery of wind farms (Figure 2.2.). The Chevrolet commercial proceeds to stating that this will in the next few years reduce emissions by up to 8 million metric tons, which then presents a certain amount of trees that is needed to sequester a similar

amount of carbon emissions in one year. To support the viewer's imagining of Yellowstone as a forest the MMI depicts a forest (Figure 2.2.).



**Figure 2.2.** Frames are from “Chevrolet Spaceship Earth” supporting a voice-over about the investment of renewable energy.

This technology narrative is misleading both because of its irrelevant claims and hidden trade-off. For the information about the metric tons of emissions to be relevant the viewer of the commercial has to be able to put the amount into some context, for instance the annual global carbon emissions. The author of the commercial seems to be aware of this because he decides to modify the amount of emissions into an amount of trees determined with a comparison to a big familiar area in America, Yellowstone National Park.<sup>70</sup> However, if the criterion for validating such a fact is the scientific method, the information mediated by the commercial is still irrelevant. Without being able to compare the impact of the trees with scientific information on the state of the climate, the modification does not help the viewer to assume whether the magnitude of this emission reduction is significant or not. The modification of the emissions into a forest, the size of Yellowstone, further establishes the tendency of the WCSI-narrative to legitimate itself through narrative knowledge, legitimated chiefly by metanarratives.

The hidden trade-off of this technology narrative legitimating the WCSI-narrative, is hidden in the fact that promoting the purchase of a car, because a part of

<sup>70</sup> The universality of such rhetoric, as well as the international distribution of narratives in the West, is indicated by the fact that an Icelandic oil-company commercial on HVO-mixed diesel fuel, promoted to emit less carbon, uses corresponding narratives and rhetoric, even adapting the simile to forestry, and comparing the size of the “carbon-reduction”-forest to the size of the capital Reykjavík (*Olís*, “Olís – VLO”, Pipar/TBWA, Reykjavík 2013. Accessed on the 2nd of May 2014: [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJPfZfSQrzQ&feature=share&list=UU9ecqG7ijh0D8-gLobKfggQ>].



the profit the company makes from selling it is used to invest in technology to reduce carbon emission, dismisses the impact of the car's emissions on the environment.

The *IDEO* commercial presents technology narratives that do not portray specific solutions, but instead it discusses the possibilities of design and innovation in the context of climate change. It presents a technology narrative about the role design has to “play in addressing [climate change]”. This narrative is legitimated by the metanarrative of progress, through a personal pragmatic narrative that can be represented with the utterance “all you need is will”. The presence of the metanarrative of progress is further established with a statement that presupposes political will and agency to reduce carbon emissions drastically, a premise hard to legitimate with anything other than a constantly progressing humanity: “Countries are moving towards reducing carbon emissions by as much as 80% by 2050. That’s a massive change.” However, the commercial can be seen as attempting to legitimate this prospected shift, but still that validation is via the metanarrative of progress, whereas the MMI does not present any specific design projects in detail, it only asserts the possibilities of design thinking through arbitrary images of possible projects and by employing metaphors of construction. All of this underpins the aforementioned personal pragmatic narrative. This narrative, and at the same time the *IDEO* brand, is framed as opposing the government:

How do we deal with it? One way is to rely on the policy makers and wait for change to come to us. Another way is for all of us to participate in imagining what life would be like in 20 or 30 years.

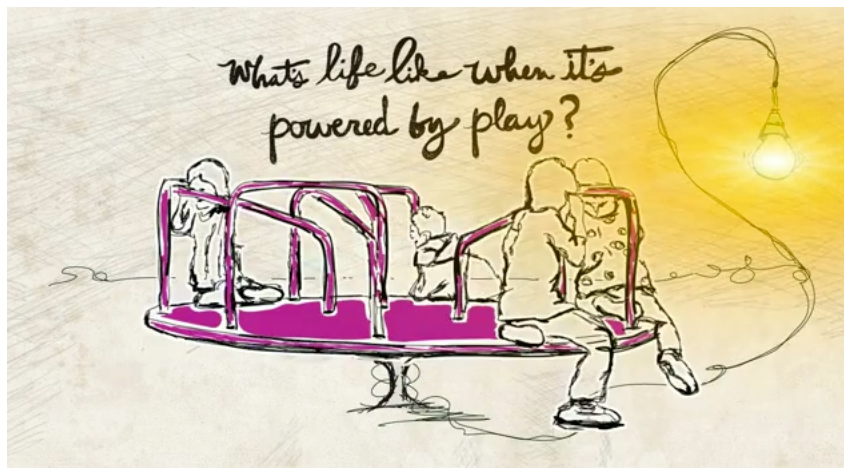
In this way, the commercial contrasts its legitimation of the WCSI with an impersonal, distant and slow developing bureaucratic narrative of the government.<sup>71</sup> This produces a slight paradox when considered in relation with the previous premise that the commercial asserted, regarding the countries pushing towards drastic reductions of carbon emissions, whereas, such a statement is legitimized by a narrative on a rational and resolute government. Nevertheless, the personal pragmatic narrative is furthered by the depiction of the mindset that is characteristic of design thinking, vis-à-vis climate change:

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<sup>71</sup> This contrast is further established towards the end of the commercial, when the CEO of *IDEO* says “No doom and gloom. No political agenda. This is a place where we can share our best thoughts and ideas.” This phrase is further examined in section 2.3.

By starting with the human experience we begin to point towards new possibilities and move the conversation away from what we have to give up and toward what we will create.

Here the personal pragmatic narrative indicates that imagining responses to climate change, on a personal everyday level, can disclose opportunities to create something new. And the commercial continues by presenting the idea of shifting the supposed focus from all of the things that the pre-supposed reduction of carbon emissions will force us to give up. This is an ambiguous piece of text, but it can be understood as encouraging creation rather than consumption. And the animations of new technologies for the everyday life support this narrative, for instance, an animation of children generating energy by riding a playground roundabout (Figure 2.3.).



**Figure 2.3.** *What's life like when it's powered by play?* A frame from an animation in the *IDEO* commercial.

However, the presentation of this narrative is problematic in several ways. The division between creation and consumption is not clear. Because the speaking subject of this commercial, *IDEO*, or specifically its CEO, is indirectly promoting the design knowledge accumulated within *IDEO* and its consultancy, thus, commodities with exchange value, whilst promoting *IDEO*'s website project for the public. Therefore, this presentation of design thinking, as something underpinning the shift from the consumption society to a more sustainable, personal and pragmatic way of living, becomes contradictory in the hands of *IDEO*. Hence, underlying the technology narrative is also a consumption narrative. As in the case of the *GM* commercial the private subject, here design thinkers, or the firm *IDEO*, are presented as the subject of the WCSI-narrative. Thus fetishizing the firm's commodity, the design knowledge,

with the significance of the narrative. This, results in the commodity, design knowledge, not only being a desirable way to think, but a desirable way to imagine your self as solving the climate crisis.

There is another problem in the presentation of the personal pragmatic narrative, related to the one just discussed. It is manifested in the phrasing to “move the conversation away from what we have to give up and toward what we will create.” Bearing in mind the stance that the commercial takes on the inevitable reduction of carbon emissions, this phrase is most correctly understood as merely shifting the focus on the ways that individuals can actually have an impact, instead of doing nothing and dreading the imminent chaos of reducing emissions. However, it is possible to misunderstand this phrase as an urge to deny the fact that “we have to give [things] up,” denying the reality of climate change, and trying to create more things. Such a reception is not unlikely, especially whereas the information presented in the commercial is quite abstract. Furthermore, this interpretation of the utterance underpins the sustaining of consumption, which would further legitimate the consumption narrative underlying the *IDEO* commercial. Thus, the ambiguity of the aforementioned phrase does not have to be a sign of bad writing, it could be consciously crafted rhetoric to legitimate the personal pragmatist narrative and a consumption narrative at the same time, although a careful reading of the commercial discloses the contradicting nature of the technology narrative being produced simultaneously.

Lastly, the problem with the presentation of the personal pragmatic narrative is the fact that it is legitimized, like other technology narratives supporting the WCSI-narrative, by the metanarrative of progress, instead of scientific knowledge. In this commercial the validation takes place through pre-supposing the political will and agency to reduce carbon emissions, and moreover by constructing metaphors of progress. These metaphors are for instance the portrayal of the website promoted – a materialization of design thinking – as a building under construction (Figure 2.4.).

And furthermore, the image of the children generating energy for a light bulb has connotations to historical scientific discoveries and the Enlightenment, the foundation of the progress narrative. Underpinnings through this metanarrative, without any detailed explanations of design thinking or allusions to the scientific knowledge on climate change, establish the personal pragmatic narrative, supporting the WCSI-narrative, as lacking scientific credibility.



**Figure 2.4.** A frame from the *IDEO* commercial with animation depicting the *Livingclimatechange.com* website as a building under construction.

By presenting technology narratives on the possibility of solving or handling climate change, thus, generally legitimating the WCSI-narrative, then excluding the public from the subject of this narrative, and instead making the commodity of the corporate institution the subject, a narrative demanding the consumption of commodities is produced. This indicates that the chief narrative legitimating the WCSI-narrative, within the corporate discourse, is a “Consumption can solve climate change”-narrative.

### **2.3. Legitimizing the WCSI-Narrative within the Corporate Discourse**

The analysis of the commercials by *GM* and *IDEO* reveals how the WCSI-narrative is produced within corporate discourse. Both MMIs deploy narratives, chiefly validated by the metanarrative of progress rather than scientific knowledge, which present technology and consumption as solutions, in order to legitimize the WCSI-narrative. The WCSI-narrative within the corporate discourse thus misrepresents climate change in a similar way as the WCSI-narrative within the political discourse, by emphasizing man’s control over nature and dismissing the unsolvable nature of climate change, portraying an over simplified image of the problem.

The corporate WCSI-narrative can be rewritten, in the same way as the political WCSI-narrative, as a “Climate change is not a problem but a challenge”-narrative. This narrative was produced within the political discourse, portraying climate change as a serious problem and combining it with a narrative that presented

technology as a solution to climate change, and thus simply presenting the crisis as a challenge for the nation. However, on the one hand, within the corporate discourse, sampled in this section, there is a lack of narrative that portrays the seriousness of climate change. On the other hand, the nature of the challenge, as something desirable to face, is established clearly, in a more decisive way than within the political discourse. This is done, as previously explained, by excluding the public from identifying with the WCSI-narrative and offering them access to the subject of the narrative through consumption of the commodity promoted. And instead of legitimizing a “You should trust us”-narrative, like the political WCSI-narrative, the corporate discourse can be seen to serve a “You should consume”-narrative.

In the *GM* commercial climate change is merely gestured with non-dramatic footage (Figure 2.1.), in order to legitimate the addressing of ways to reduce emissions, and in the *IDEO* commercial climate change is said to be a “massive challenge” without further explanation. The focus is therefore primarily on the response to climate change, but although this seems to leave a meager narrative orientated around the presentation of crisis, it is possible to determine a climate change narrative from the portrayal of the solutions. The *GM* commercial ends on a metatextual note, commenting on its own WCSI-narrative:

Is it enough? No. But it's a start. Because the true conservationist knows that the world is not given to us by our fathers and mothers, it is borrowed from our children. Its why today, tomorrow and on into a better future, we can proudly say: Chevy Runs Deep.

This voice-over, combined with footage of a *Chevrolet* car cruising in a natural environment, takes a moderately positive stance towards the WCSI-narrative it produces. First it states that the practice promoted by *Chevrolet* is not a complete solution to climate change, but it is portrayed as a first step in the direction of a more total solution. This is followed with a statement on the need to sustain our planet, and then, all of a sudden, in strong contrast to the moderate rhetoric before, the “start” has become a guarantee for a good ending, “a better future”.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> This “better future” is then connected with the brand, adding to the WCSI-fetishizing of *Chevrolet*. And in tact with the dominant legitimization of the metanarrative of progress, the commercial ends with *Chevrolet*'s tagline that portrays the firm's long history of automobile making, and therefore its evident progress through the years.

This narrative on climate change, as a story with a good ending, is a misrepresentation of climate change. Pre-supposing a positive outcome from human confrontation with the climate crisis cannot be grounded by the present scientific consensus. This is not the same as saying optimism is always irrelevant if the future is uncertain, whereas optimism as a way to imagine a good outcome, can be an incentive to perform well. However, portraying a “better future” as a self-evident fact produces an overly optimistic narrative. Such overly optimistic narratives can be a result of producing consumption narratives, whereas the more desirable future is presented, the more desirable the commodity associated with it becomes.<sup>73</sup>

These narratives are also to be found in the *IDEO* commercial, which strengthens the argument that corporate institutions producing consumption narratives are encouraged to exaggerate the value of their commodity. In the *IDEO* commercial the CEO talks about “exploring possible solutions, in an optimistic and real world way” and promises that *LivingClimateChange.com* is not a forum for “doom and gloom”. These declarations are produced in contrast to pessimistic narratives on the climate crisis, also referred to as apocalyptic narratives that have been deployed by various institutions in the past, and also much criticized.<sup>74</sup> Instead of depicting climate change as the end of the world, climate change is portrayed as the birth of a “better world”, which contemporary humans can approach by “participat[ing] in imagining what life would be like in 20 or 30 years.” Thinking about climate change, and therefore climate change itself at present times, is portrayed as an exciting challenge meant to be approached with optimism and a mind free of doom and gloom.

This representation of climate change is unethical, considering the humans and other organisms that have suffered and will be made to suffer because of the impact of climate change. Furthermore, such an optimistic narrative misrepresents climate change in the same way as other legitimizing narratives of the WCSI-narrative, by simplifying the crisis. This is yet another example of the faulty nature of dualistic thinking, a thing is not completely positive or negative. Now, in the same way as the

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<sup>73</sup> I concluded the section on political discourse as defining the political WCSI-narrative as overly optimistic. That conclusion finds resonance in the final conclusion of this paper. However, the overly optimistic narrative mentioned here needs to be differentiated from those concluding interpretations of the political WCSI-narrative as overly optimistic. Here I am directly pinpointing narratives with the main purpose of identifying the climate change situation with a optimistic mindset.

<sup>74</sup> For instance, Giovanni Bettini, “Climate Barbarians at the Gates? A Critique of Apocalyptic Narratives of ‘Climate Refugees’”, *Geoforum*, 45 (2013), Elsevier, Amsterdam 2013, pp. 63-72.

completely negative apocalyptic narrative concerning climate change has been criticized, I am identifying and criticizing its contrasting optimistic narrative.

### 3. Legitimizing the Public – The Nonprofit Discourse

Little darling  
The smiles returning to the faces  
Little darling  
It seems like years since it's been clear

Here comes the sun  
Here comes the sun, and I say  
It's all right  
George Harrison. *Here Comes the Sun*

The narrative analysis is portrayed, in the introduction, as an attempt to establish a shift towards increased optimism in the discussion on climate change. A substantial quote from Žižek's *Living in the End Times* highlights the enthusiasm of nation states and corporate businesses for new “green” economic opportunities. The two previous sections of this narrative analysis establish the existence of such a positive shift within the discourse of political institutions and businesses, manifested in a narrative I have chosen to call the WCSI-narrative, and is legitimated by optimistic narratives on technology, consumption and even optimism itself.

Later in the quoted chapter, “Apocalypse at the Gates”, Žižek incorporates the notion of narratives into his thinking:

Those very same politicians and managers who, until recently, dismissed fears of global warming as the apocalyptic scaremongering of ex-communists, or at least as based on insufficient evidence – and who thus assured us that there was no reason for panic, that, basically, things would carry on as usual – are now all of a sudden threatening global warming as a simple fact, as just another part of “carrying on as usual”.<sup>75</sup>

The results from the narrative analysis are so far in accordance with Žižek's elaboration of the discursive shift. Portraying global warming as “a simple fact” fits the simplicity detected in the WCSI-narrative hitherto, something I furthermore frame as a misrepresentation of climate change, as the narrative fails to render the complexity of the problem. And the corresponding “Carrying on as usual”-narrative that Žižek mentions reflects what I have called the “Climate change is not a problem

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<sup>75</sup> Žižek, p. 329.



but a challenge”-narrative, and demonstrates a climate change narrative primarily legitimizing both the political and corporate WCSI-narrative.

However, in this last section of the narrative analysis the focus is on the discourse of nonprofit environmental organizations, which, unlike the others, do not have a history of “dismissed fears”, presenting climate change as “apocalyptic scaremongering” or seeing it as “based on insufficient evidence.”<sup>76</sup> Identifying the presence of the WCSI-narrative in the nonprofit discourse does therefore not represent a shift from climate change denial to a narrative addressing climate change. The existence of the WCSI-narrative cannot be explained as the result of an ever-strengthening scientific consensus, as could supposedly be the reason for the discursive shift within the political and corporate discourses. The task of nonprofit environmental organizations is to convey the scientific knowledge on the environment to the public and put pressure on political and corporate authorities. Their work is therefore not dependent on profit or economic growth, both of which are obvious factors in distorting the rendering of scientific knowledge within the political and corporate discourses.

The pool of text addressing climate change within the nonprofit discourse is significantly more extensive than comparable data produced by corporate institutions and political institutions. A likely explanation is that nonprofit institutions have environmental issues as a central focus in their work, and moreover, they are able to produce low-budget MMIs for the web, something that is not as acceptable for business or political institutions.

While the production of the WCSI-narrative is a general feature of MMIs produced by American corporations and political institutions, some of the MMIs within the nonprofit discourse present a detailed and sound narrative on climate change and do not present responses to it that simplify the crisis. Despite the production of the WCSI-narrative not being as commonplace within the nonprofit discourse, one of the biggest nonprofit organizations focusing on climate change produces the WCSI-narrative in most of its promotional MMIs. This is the *The Climate Reality Project*, mentioned in the introduction.

The organization has produced numerous MMIs on climate change in relation to a variety of campaigns it has run and supported, and this last section of the

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<sup>76</sup> Hereafter this discourse is abbreviated as “the nonprofit discourse”.

narrative analysis is orientated around these MMIs. Otherwise, this section is constructed in a similar fashion as the other two, with three subsections.

In the first subsection a few MMIs from the *We Campaign* are examined, in order to illustrate the production of the “we”-narrative within the nonprofit organizations and its potential breadth reflected in the development of a national nonprofit “we” of the *We Campaign*, to a more international “we” in the discourse of *The Climate Change Reality Project*.

In the latter two sections the focus is on two MMIs by *The Climate Reality Project*, “The Climate Reality Pledge”<sup>77</sup> and “The Way Forward”.<sup>78</sup> Both produce similar narratives, conveying the stance of *The Climate Reality Project* and its conception of how climate change can be mitigated, although “The Climate Reality Pledge” has the additional practical aim of promoting a collective public signing of a pledge for a clean energy future. The WCSI-narrative produced by both MMIs presents the idea of implementing carbon taxes on the carbon polluting industry, obtained with applied pressure to political institutions by public participation.

“The Climate Reality Pledge” is an approximately one minute high tempo animation where the imagery is constantly transforming, from words to phrases and into images. The abstract form of the circle is bounced back and fourth, signifying numerous different things – people, loudspeakers and the Earth itself. “The Way Forward” is a roughly five minute MMI of professionally shot footage and provident animations. It can be divided into two sections, plus a little one-minute epilogue of irony. A dramatic solo piano leads the way in the first half of the MMI, where great historical events, international heroes and celebrities, as well as, famous monuments of civilization rush by, followed by a montage of big wars and national tragedies, leading into a listing of the intensity of the climate crisis. Optimistic yet humble digital string music provides the river for our sailing through a second half of solutions to the climate crisis, and an ironic epilogue mixing together images of

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<sup>77</sup> *The Climate Reality Project*, “The Climate Reality Pledge”, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 14th of November 2012. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzlqGnPMm3U>].

<sup>78</sup> *The Climate Reality Project*, “The Way Forward”, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 22nd of October 2013. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7tntAdhJUY>].

natural beauty and extreme weather events under a soothing post-war pop song with a female vocalist.

### 3.1. Public Narratives – Legitimizing the Nonprofit “We”

The subject of the WCSI-narrative within the nonprofit discourse is generally different from both the political and corporate WCSI-narratives. The “we” of the nonprofit discourse is not characterized by a relationship between the producer of the discourse and the viewer, but dominantly portrayed as a big holistic group, the national or global public. In the promotional material related to the *We Campaign* from 2008, produced by *The Alliance for Climate Protection*, now titled *The Climate Reality Project*, a nationalistic “we”-narrative grounded on the metanarrative of progress legitimates a deployment of a WCSI-narrative. The MMIs specifically portray a diverse public, which, nevertheless, is in agreement on the severity of climate change. In one of the campaign’s MMIs a female voice-over declares that “we have come together despite of our differences, determined to solve the climate crisis”<sup>79</sup> and in another, the Democrat Nancy Pelosi and Republican Newt Gingrich, introduced as life-long supporters of their parties, tell the viewer that they seldom agree but they do agree on the need to solve climate change (Figure 3.1.).<sup>80</sup>

The national “we”-narrative of these commercials is legitimized by the metanarrative of progress, although in a different register from the political and corporate narrative. What I have referred to as the metanarrative of progress is based on the two main metanarratives identified by Lyotard in his report on knowledge. One is a narrative of the progress of man’s knowledge via science, the ground for the technology narrative chiefly validating the political and corporate WCSI-narratives. However, the nonprofit WCSI-narrative, legitimized by a resolute presentation of a holistic public subject, traces its credibility to the other metanarrative Lyotard defines,

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<sup>79</sup>The Alliance for Climate Protection, “Burger and Tofu Ad on Climate Change”, *We Campaign*, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 11th of June 2008. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck\\_exdACPN8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck_exdACPN8)].

<sup>80</sup>The Alliance for Climate Protection, “Nancy Pelosi and Newt Gingrich Commercial on Climate Change”, *We Campaign*, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 17th of April 2008. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qi6n\\_wB154](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qi6n_wB154)].

the narrative of man's progression towards emancipation and increased personal liberty.



**Figure 3.1.** Frames from the *We Campaign* advertisements with Nancy Pelosi and Newt Gingrich in the lower right corner.

Both of these narratives are a part of the metanarrative of progress and they are both deployed within all three discourses analyzed in this paper, although in different proportion, and when it comes to the nonprofit WCSI-narrative, the progress of the individual within democracy is in the foreground. Another advertisement from the *We Campaign* epitomizes this production of a legitimating “we”-narrative, with old footage depicting events in American history corresponding to a male voice-over, which describes the progression of the American public:

We didn't wait for someone else to storm the beaches of Normandy. We didn't wait for someone else to guarantee civil rights or put a man on the moon and we can't wait for someone else to solve the global climate crisis. We need to act. And we need to act now. Join us. Together we can solve the climate crisis.<sup>81</sup>

Towards the end of the commercial the viewer is encouraged to join the speaker. The suddenness of the address is likely to surprise the viewer because up until that moment the “we”-narrative has been directed at the national public. Thus, the commercial constructs an ambiguous “we” that both legitimates the power of a

<sup>81</sup> The Alliance for Climate Protection, “We Can Solve It TV Ad (We Campaign)”, *We Campaign*, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 4th of April 2008. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITVxF8ILJaU>].

national public that is on its way to solve climate change, but at the same time, excludes the viewer from this subject, making the act of joining the campaign a prerequisite for being “allowed” to identify with the crisis-solving subject. This rhetorical tactic is similar to the presentation of the corporate WCSI-narrative, where the viewer was conditioned to consume a commodity to identify with the subject of the WCSI-narrative presented.

This portrayal of a public “we”-narrative firmly legitimized by a progress narrative is still present in the 2013 *Climate Reality Project* promotional MMI “The Way Forward” and “The Climate Reality Pledge” from 2012. However, the narrative is less nationalistic, which is not a peculiar development considering that the organization has now trained people from over hundred countries through its Climate Reality Leadership Corps and has offices in nine countries outside the United States: Australia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.<sup>82</sup>

The “we” of these more recent MMIs is also more accurately framed. In them it is positioned as a part of a counter narrative. The WCSI-narrative is in other words presented as a counter narrative to the messages emanating from the carbon polluting industries. In “The Climate Reality Pledge” a female voice-over depicts quite accurately this polluter narrative – signified with an animation of polluting industry transforming into fat pollution-drenched businessmen (Figure 3.2.) – as the opposite of the WCSI-narrative:

You’ve got a voice. You could scream with it. Shout. Yell. Whisper.  
They’ve got a voice. They can propagate. Misinform. Even hide the truth.  
They say climate change can’t be solved. Will you be silent?

The nonprofit WCSI-narrative produced in this MMI posits a contrast with a “Climate change can’t be solved”-narrative cited as the narrative of the carbon polluting industry (Figure 3.2). This presentation, depicting the reality of reacting to climate change, demonstrates a dualistic world of good and bad, characterized by a conflict between solving climate change and not solving climate change.

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<sup>82</sup> The Climate Reality Project, “Climate Reality Leadership Corps”, on the web, 2014. Accessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2014: [<http://climaterealityproject.org/leadership-corps/>].

A new narrative legitimating the nonprofit “we” has surfaced and can be called a good-guy narrative, as opposed to the bad-guy narrative, which legitimates the malevolence of the “they”, the carbon pollution industry. This polarization of the climate change discussion, orientated around the verb “solve” manages to misrepresent the issue significantly. For instance, if we only examine the previous discussion on the fundamental misrepresentation manifested in the assertion of solving climate change (section 1.3), it becomes evident that this portrayal of the two sides is extremely problematic.

In section 1.3, I explain how the utterance “climate change can’t be solved” has more credibility than the WCSI-narrative. However, considering the polarized presentation of the good-guy/bad-guy narratives, in the MMI from *The Climate Reality Project*, a “climate change can’t be solved”-stance is no better than the climate change denial of the carbon polluting industries. Either one believes that climate change can be solved, or one is working against the movement that wants to respond responsibly to climate change.



**Figure 3.2.** Frames from “The Climate Reality Pledge.”

Furthermore, the risk of framing this issue based on a simple unconsidered dualism, gives the people that presumably do not want to respond in an effective way to climate change, a chance to manipulate the discussion. Here I am referring to the possibility that these “bad-guy”-institutions, produce a WCSI-narrative, not

representing the complex nature of climate change and its urgency. This is of course what they have been found doing in section 2, which underpins the graveness of the nonprofit discourse presenting such a simple and easily manipulated framing of the discourse.

A similar flaw inherent in the dualistic narrative presentation is related to a syntactic element of the WCSI-narrative's core sentence that does not get much attention in this analysis. That is the modal auxiliary verb of the verb phrase, the "can". It has a very important but hidden role for this analysis, as it could be argued that it provides the key to the misrepresentations I have identified. A modal auxiliary verb brings modality to a sentence, rendering the asserting of a possibility. However, as I have explained, asserting the possibility of solving climate change has numerous complications and can be argued to be faulty considering the chronic nature of the issue. But this modality and the complications it produces can facilitate the institutions that believe they will not benefit from reducing carbon emissions, in manipulating the discussion of the institutions. The nonprofit organization *The Climate Reality Project* is presumably countering the correct institutions, but the counter narrative it proposes as materializing their stance is not accurate. A narrative that better suits their stake is "We do not want to solve climate change". However, presenting such a narrative as a contrast to the nonprofit WCSI-narrative could disclose the true narrative behind the ideas that the nonprofit discourse deploys on climate change: "We want to solve climate change" (rather than "We can"). Examining the possible repression of this narrative in contemporary society would be an interesting research issue.

However, to conclude this subsection, it is worth emphasizing the fact that the legitimization of the "we" in the nonprofit WCSI-narrative is grounded in a public narrative, which can portray nationalistic tendencies through its rooting in the progress narrative, often intertwined with national history. Furthermore, it is portrayed as a counter narrative to the carbon polluting industry – although the narrative countered is probably not a stance the industry will ever want to perform publically – in order to legitimize itself as a righteous narrative, and thus a part of the good-guy narrative.

### 3.2. Public Participation Narratives – Legitimizing Nonprofit Solutions

The narratives legitimizing the “solve” in the nonprofit WCSI-narrative are variable, and overall they tend to present a more complex solution to climate change than the other two discourses. However, presenting solutions to the complex and irreversible chronic impact of climate change has proven to be a guarantee for a misleading portrayal of reality in the previous sections of this analysis.

The legitimization of the nonprofit “solve” is generally twofold. First there is the legitimization of the narrative of public participation serving as an initial step towards solving the crisis. Then another narrative finds legitimacy in the public participation narrative in order to propose a specific solution. However, the latter narrative generally includes a different subject than established in the previous section. The narratives that legitimate the subject of the WCSI-narrative tend to be solely aimed at supporting a public “we”-narrative, or in some instances the somewhat differently framed good-guy narrative. But when it comes to legitimating the latter “solve”-narrative it can become problematic to find a corresponding “we”-narrative. This problem can be exemplified by examining the point in “The Way Forward” where the “solve”-narrative of the WCSI-narrative is presented, after listing the variable impacts of climate change:

But here is the good news. There is a solution. [MAKE CARBON POLLUTERS PAY] Polluters must pay the cost of carbon pollution and they can do it through a number of market-based policies. Like a fee that takes into account how much it will cost to manage this mess or putting a limit on emissions and creating a market for carbon trading. And we have to stop political leaders from giving fossil fuel companies billions in tax-breaks and give-aways. And for leaders that deny the reality of climate change, we must use our voices and our votes to exact a political price. When we put a price on carbon, energy companies and utilities will be forced to make their operations cleaner and lower their pollution, as a result clean energy like renewables will continue to get cheaper and cheaper because the polluters won't be able to give us fire-sale prices on carbon which is actually costing us a bundle in other ways. And that means we all will be able to make better and smarter choices about the energy we are consuming.

This male voice-over from “The Way Forward” shows all the different subjects manifested in the nonprofit WCSI-narrative, which primarily seeks to legitimate the subject of the public and posits the political subject as the one who bears the responsibility of legitimating the narrative concerning state regulation of energy



companies. Nevertheless, in an attempt to legitimize the political subject the public participation is made to emphasize the validation agency of the democratic system – giving the public control over the politicians by voting and the right to speech. This control the public is given over the politicians, renders the difference between their subjects quite blurred, but theoretically the good-guy narrative could underpin this, by serving as a new “we”-narrative, covering the subject of people that identify with the regulation narrative, and the politicians they pressure or vote for.

However, the reality is that the political subject, no matter how “correctly” the public votes, is not a constant in the discursive realm, but will always establish uncertainty in the nonprofit WCSI-narrative. The politician can always betray the trust of the voters and not do what he promises. Therefore, the public participation narrative produced to legitimate this complex nonprofit WCSI-narrative does not have the capacity to do so. Thus, the WCSI-narrative misrepresents the complexity and uncertainty of the regulation narrative, which it relies on as a part of its solution.

The WCSI-narrative portrayed in these MMIs is so complex, compared to the corporate and political narratives, that it was possible to form an argument on the problematic legitimization, without even discussing one of the main legitimizing narratives. That is our old pal from the previous sections, the technology narrative, which surfaces in the end of the quote above, portraying the public as finally “able to make better and smarter choices about the energy we are consuming”. And there is also a trace of the consumption narrative, but as detected in the corporate section it can form a legitimizing relationship with the technology narrative, on the basis of the consumer choosing to identify with a sustainable future driven by renewable energy. In the end the “solve”-narrative of the nonprofit WCSI-narrative is a technology narrative, legitimized by consumption and a number of different narratives that have been mentioned before in this section.

The nonprofit WCSI-narrative therefore presents the most holistic and credible response to climate change, although presenting the solution to climate change leads to misrepresentations similar to those evidenced by the political and corporate discourses. However, the deployment of the words “solution” and “solve” can be ignored or interpreted freely so that the presentation of the nonprofit WCSI-narrative can be received as a “We can improve our response to climate change”-narrative. Such an interpretation, nevertheless, fails to resolve the problem related to the

homogenous legitimizing strategy of the nonprofit WCSI-narrative, solely supported by the public “we”-narrative, via the public participation narrative.

The simplified nature of the nonprofit WCSI-narrative is underpinned with extremely simple argumentative statements.<sup>83</sup> This quote from “The Climate Reality Pledge” is quite extensive on a word-count scale:

It’s time to use your voice. Take the Climate Reality Pledge. Join the thinkers, believers, dreamers, and doers who have joined together to change the world. Help spark the movement that drives the world forward and shapes the future powered by optimism and innovation. Sign the pledge, share it, we need your help to inform, influence and inspire others to drive solutions and demand action from our leaders. Your voice has the power to change the conversation. Together our voice has the power to change the world.

When, however, the argument is put together it simply comes to “Sign your name and change the world”. A similarly simple public participation narrative is deployed in another MMI from *The Climate Reality Project* from 2012. It is not to be analyzed thoroughly here, but it is titled “Push Button. Save Planet” and promotes a way to support the EPA’s proposal of a limit to carbon pollution via the web.<sup>84</sup> The animation depicts a finger pushing a button while a male voice-over states: “Its as simple as this” (Figure 3.3.).

These portrayals of ways to deal with climate change speak to the “positive shift” that Žižek discusses in regard to governments and corporations. Presenting such non-demanding solutions to a problem that has been portrayed with apocalyptic scenarios is over-all an optimistic narrative. To legitimize this optimism, it is directly

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<sup>83</sup> Some would find my critique here of the WCSI-narrative to contradict my presentation of the MMIs as a practical form of discourse production for analyses, due to its need to be simple and concise (see Introduction). To clarify, the mere simplification of narrative on the climate crisis is not the misrepresentation detected here, although the act of simplification seems to be the main force yielding the misrepresentation. For this argument it suffices to assume that simplifying a narrative should not automatically lead to its misrepresentation. However, it is interesting to further this discussion though it will not serve this paper directly. These speculations bring out the normative nature of the concept misrepresentation. By lessening the content of a narrative, the narrative conveys less symbols, but this could increase the capability of presentation in correlation to its ambiguity. Whether a narrative within public discourse misrepresents something will always need argumentation, and thus moralization, because of the relativeness of misrepresentation. For instance, talking in abstract philosophical terms, all utterances are misrepresentations, because language can never fully escape misrepresenting the world, whereas it can never perfectly reflect it. See further, Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale, Humanities Press, New Jersey 1999, pp. 79-91.

<sup>84</sup> *The Climate Reality Project*, “The Way Forward”, a multimedia moving image on Youtube.com, published on the website on the 5th of June 2012. Accessed on 8th of March 2014: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxeg2Qiv7QM>].

portrayed as necessary for the validation of the WCSI-narrative, as an optimism narrative. Similar to the presentation of optimism in the *IDEO* commercial, the nonprofit WCSI narrative is legitimated by a specific optimism narrative.<sup>85</sup> This can be observed in the large quote here above from “The Climate Reality Pledge”, where the public participation narrative is rendered as optimism that will power the future. The optimism of the WCSI-narrative is also materialized in a narrative towards the end of “The Way Forward” where a male voice-over states: “It’s time to end the denial and embrace opportunity.”



**Figure 3.3.** Frames from the animation “Push Button. Save Planet” from *The Climate Reality Project*.

The dualism manifested in this quote is also misleading, in the same way as the dualistic representation of good-guy and bad-guy narratives, discussed above. This quote conveys the faulty idea that either a person denies climate change or embraces it as an opportunity. What about the person that wants to address climate change but does not want to frame it as a positive thing?<sup>86</sup>

### 3.3. A Nonprofit WCSI-Narrative

The WCSI-narrative is a major part of the discourse produced by the nonprofit organization *The Climate Reality Project*. However, most of the MMIs also deploy a narrative on climate change, which is legitimized by scientific knowledge, explaining the causes and affects of climate change, and even referring to various parts of the world when explaining the impact of these changes. The extensive disregard of the complexities of the problem in political and corporate discourse and the absence of

<sup>85</sup> This is not mere rhetoric, as when the political WCSI-narrative is defined as optimistic.

<sup>86</sup> Again, the examination of possible repression of moderate narratives on climate change would be interesting.

any attempt to explain the issue, being perhaps the clearest indicator of willful blindness, does not characterize the climate change narratives presented in the MMIs of *The Climate Reality Project* and other nonprofit environmental organizations. In the MMI “The Way Forward” the voice-over even addresses the complexity of this issue as it presents footage depicting the enormousness of planet Earth (Figure 3.4.):

Now we are faced with another challenge. One so massive and so all-encompassing that it is hard for many of us to even grasp. Earth our home is in trouble. Carbon pollution is warming our planet, melting sea ice and creating stronger and more frequent storms, droughts, floods, and wild fires, and we are all paying the price for it in some way.

The first sentence of the quote above, acts as a bridge from the preceding montage of international progress. The scientifically legitimized climate change narrative, in the quote is therefore presented as a natural continuation of the progress narrative. In this way the MMI incorporates climate change with the progress narrative, as the contemporary challenge to man’s progress, to be dealt with, like the preceded historical difficulties and victories listed before, thus legitimizing the imminent success of tackling the climate crisis.

A pattern is forming between the three different discourses, analyzed in this paper as producers of the WCSI-narrative. No matter how detailed, ethical and scientifically sound a climate change narrative is – if presented in a legitimizing relationship with a WCSI-narrative – the end product is a WCSI-narrative.<sup>87</sup>

In “The Way Forward” a climate change narrative presenting a challenge “so massive and so all-encompassing that it is hard for many of us to even grasp” is rendered through its legitimizing relations with the WCSI-narrative as an opportunity, which the public can embrace, if it only stops denying climate change. This exemplifies the tension that can form between the WCSI-narrative and other narratives in presentations of climate change. It also discloses the dominance of the WCSI-narrative. In “The Way Forward” this tension is manifested in a peculiar situation. The victims of various extreme weather events are depicted via media

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<sup>87</sup> Using the rhetoric of Mendel-ian genetics and constructing a metaphor of the climate change discourse as a particular climate change gene in the total genome of Western discourse: the WCSI-narrative would always render as the dominant allele contrasting the other narratives as recessive allele. On allele, dominant and recessive, Robert J. Brooker, “Chapter 2: Mendelian inheritance”, *Genetics: Analysis & Principles*, fourth edition, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2012, p. 22.

footage in the beginning of the MMI and used to illustrate a climate change narrative. However, in order to legitimize what the WCSI-narrative presents as the opportunity of climate change towards the end, the viewer needs to deny the victims previously depicted or not see them as part of the criteria for a solution to climate change, for the narrative progress to be rational.



**Figure 3.4.** A frame from “The Way Forward.”

Like the other WCSI-narratives, “The Way Forward” faces the dilemma of producing a paradox, resulting from defining climate change as a serious issue, and at the same time something that humans can solve. In this conflict, because of the dominant nature of the WCSI-narrative, the seriousness of the climate change problem is generally debunked.

Ironically, the nonprofit discourse is likely to produce the most influential WCSI-narrative, because in the nonprofit case, the contrast between the climate change narrative and the WCSI-narrative, between graveness and optimism, is the strongest. This is a result of the inclination of nonprofit environmental organizations to present climate change more thoroughly than the other discourses, as exemplified in “The Way Forward”.

The misrepresentation of climate change by the nonprofit WCSI-narrative can be demonstrated like the misrepresentation of the other two discourses, as a result of legitimizing the WCSI-narrative with a “Climate change is not a problem but a challenge”-narrative. But how can a nonprofit organization misrepresent the issue it strives to inform the public on? In the last section of this paper I try to form an answer

to this question, but before moving on to that discussion I want to elaborate on the possibility of the WCSI-narrative being a devised strategy.

This analysis could be criticized for not taking into account the possibility that the institutions producing narratives primarily legitimated by the progress narrative rather than scientific knowledge, are doing so consciously, in order to reach a large audience and effectively communicate the importance of responding in a serious manner to climate change. This is based on a philosophy of reception, arguing that it is easier to get people's attention and them to take part in responding to the climate crisis if you present them with solutions, rather than talking about making the situation a little bit better. Or, that it is simply easier to construct persuasive narratives by legitimating them with the idea of progress which humans tend to want to believe, rather than referring to scientific knowledge that is not as understandable to laymen.

My answer is that different levels of the success concerning mediation of climate change narratives is not an issue for this research. Thus, whether there is a possibility of the institutions consciously misrepresenting the issue in favour of a better or wider reception is of no interest to the research. The goal is not to evaluate the mediation capability of different narratives.

This paper argues the existence of a wide-spread narrative on climate change that misrepresents the issue, which can furthermore result in making the crisis more difficult to handle in the future. If it can be argued that this optimistic narrative is the best way to convey knowledge on climate change, at this point in time, it does not change the fact that the practice of producing such a narrative is faulty.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> For the sake of clear comprehension, I want to point out a condition for the faulty nature of the WCSI-narrative – its temporal context. The WCSI-narrative could have been presented in a credible way, had it been produced twenty years ago, before global warming impacted humans to any great extent and there was more capacity to prevent the most serious impacts now present or imminent.

## 4. The WCSI-narrative as Neoliberalism

Is it possible that despite our inventions and progress, despite our culture, religion and knowledge of the world, we have remained on the surface of life? Is it possible that even that surface, which might still have been something, has been covered with an unbelievably boring material, leaving it looking like drawing-room furniture in the summer holidays.

Rainer Maria Rilke. *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

The preceding chapters have addressed a shift in the discussion on climate change represented by a movement away from a narrative that denies climate change to a narrative that presents solutions to it. The main responsibility for producing and maintaining the climate change denial narrative has been relegated to the corporate sector, where various corporations believe they have a stake in preventing a response to climate change. In a broader context, however the climate change denial narrative can be seen as inflected by and emblematic of neoliberal ideology.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the deployment of a WCSI-narrative addressing the reality of climate change can indicate not only a shift from denial to enlightenment, but also the potential decline of neoliberal ideology.<sup>90</sup>

However, the WCSI-narrative has been shown to misrepresent climate change by systematically underestimating the seriousness of the crisis, putting forth overly optimistic solutions to the problem. Considering the sound scientific consensus on climate change, the misrepresentations of the WCSI-narrative convey indifference towards scientific knowledge. The WCSI-narrative can therefore, oddly enough because it appears to be addressing the crisis directly, be seen as a modification of the climate change denial narrative. In this final section I intend to strengthen this argument by underpinning the WCSI-narrative as a part of neoliberal ideology.

Neoliberalism, surfacing as a political and economic theory in the 1980s, has developed into an omnipresent ideology influencing the contemporary world

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<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, Robert J. Antonio and Robert J. Brulle “The Unbearable Lightness of Politics: Climate Change Denial and Political Polarization”, *The Sociological Quarterly*, issue 52 (2011), pp. 195-202.

<sup>90</sup> This interpretation of the political situation could also be put into context with the financial crisis in 2007-2008.

extensively.<sup>91</sup> Political scientist Wendy Brown, when discussing the broad effect of neoliberalism on society, notes that:

[N]eoliberalism carries a social analysis that, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neoliberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player. [...] I want to consider the way that this rationality is emerging as governmentality— a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social.<sup>92</sup>

Employing Foucauldian rhetoric, Brown conveys the extensive function of neoliberal ideology and conceptualizes a rationality and governmentality of neoliberalism, which can be understood as the way neoliberal ideology legitimizes itself (rationality), and controls and influences society (governmentality).<sup>93</sup> In context to the WCSI-narrative, as a part of an ideology, it demonstrates a particular rationality, through its choice of legitimating narratives and the meaning projected establishes a specific governmentality, a mode of controlling the state latently agreed upon by the people. The question in this section is whether this ideology is neoliberalism. Brown elaborates further on the rendering of all aspects of society through the sphere of the market, in order to establish their significance, thus as signifying market values. The people are not excluded from this process. Brown emphasizes the production of subjects corresponding to this rationality and governmentality. And it is obvious that these different functions of neoliberal ideology, resemble its political and economic theorization, which David Harvey presents in this way:

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<sup>91</sup> Some go as far as to state that neoliberalism “has come to dominate the contemporary world (formally, practically, culturally and imaginatively)” (Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*, Sage, London 2010, p. 2) “[...] leaving us with an “age of neoliberalism” (Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston, “Introduction”, *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, Pluto Press, London 2005, p. 1).

<sup>92</sup> Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy”, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2005, p. 39 and p. 37.

<sup>93</sup> Brown explains her understanding of the “underspecified” term of governmentality in the notes to her chapter: “The term is also intended to signify the modern importance of governing over ruling and the critical role of mentality in governing, as opposed to the notion that power and ideas are separate phenomena” (Wendy Brown, “Notes: Chapter Tree – Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy”, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2005, p. 142).



Neoliberalism [...] proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.<sup>94</sup>

However, although the implementation of a neoliberal institutional framework as described by Harvey is not a custom in all the countries of the world, and the level of implementation differs significantly between others, literature on neoliberalism generally portrays it as having an impact on global society. The following section, again from Harvey, is a good example:

There has everywhere been an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s. Deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision have been all too common. Almost all states, from those newly minted after the collapse of the Soviet Union to old-style social democracies and welfare states such as New Zealand and Sweden, have embraced, some voluntarily and in other instances in response to coercive pressures, some version of neoliberal theory and adjusted at least some policies and practices accordingly.<sup>95</sup>

Harvey's point can be further explicated by the fact that globalization is a characteristic of neoliberalism as a contemporary ideology,<sup>96</sup> with scholars such as Brown even positing it as a modification of imperialism.<sup>97</sup> Otherwise, the global influence of neoliberalism can be explained with another distinctive feature of neoliberalism. Its ability to adapt the rhetoric of other ideologies in order to disguise its functions, by signifying itself as other well-known ideologies, like liberal democracy.<sup>98</sup> Some of the literature on neoliberalism, seeing ideology as solely an imagery of society, but not also as its materialization and functioning, argue, because of this disguise mechanism, that "[n]eoliberalism can become dominant as governmentality without being dominant as ideology"<sup>99</sup> and that "[i]t is better

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<sup>94</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, New York 2005, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Harvey, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Alejandro Colás, "Neoliberalism, Globalisation and International Relations", *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, Pluto Press, London 2005, p. 70.

<sup>97</sup> See, for instance, Hugo Radice, "Neoliberal Globalisation: Imperialism without Empires?", *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, Pluto Press, London 2005, pp. 91-98.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, p. 49.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

understood as ‘hegemony’”.<sup>100</sup> This characteristic of the manifestation of neoliberal ideology is necessary to fully comprehend its presence in the WCSI-narrative as presented in the MMIs analyzed. Because some of the legitimizing narratives deployed by the WCSI-narrative can be seen as attempts to signify other ideologies than neoliberalism, nevertheless, the solutions presented by the WCSI-narrative turn out to be materializations of neoliberalism.

The McCain and *Chevrolet* commercials, discussed in the first two analytical sections, are excellent examples of how neoliberalism can employ or affect the WCSI-narrative. State regulation is dismissed in McCain’s commercial and the market is set in the foreground, as the problem is presented in context with increased oil and food prices. The *Chevrolet* commercial further foregrounds the market by establishing the solutions to climate change firmly within the market sphere, as a result of buying the right car. These two commercials offer quite clear trajectories into identifying neoliberalism in the WCSI-narrative, but nevertheless, all versions of the WCSI-narrative, analyzed in this paper, turn out to be presentations of neoliberalism.

Neoliberal ideology is most directly manifested through the “solve”-narratives of technology and consumption, which present or indicate market-based solutions to climate change. Presenting renewable energy and energy sufficient technology, without mentioning the possibility of reducing the use of fossil fuels directly by consuming less, does not only produce a technology narrative, but also a neoliberal narrative, framing the climate crisis as a problem for the market to resolve, mainly or solely, on its own.

Furthermore, the simplified portrayal of climate change as a thing to solve, emphasizing primarily the stake of future generations, corresponds to the imperialist projection of neoliberalism, whereas such framing turns a blind eye towards the masses in the developing countries that, at this point, have had a much closer encounter with climate change than the Western world. This imperialist character of the WCSI-narrative also surfaces clearly in the national narrative of the political discourse and the 2008 MMIs from the *We Campaign*, with Obama declaring that America should “lead global efforts to fight [climate change]” and the *We Campaign* legitimizing its narrative with victorious moments in American history.

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<sup>100</sup> Antonio Gramsci’s term, similar to ideology, but highlights the latent nature of the power relations, “foregrounding some things and excluding others entirely from view” (Couldry, p. 6).

In section 3 I asked: How can a nonprofit organization misrepresent the issue it strives to inform the public on? The answer lies in the cloaking device neoliberalism possesses, mentioned before. Brown specifically discusses the cloaking function, in the American context, regarding the application of liberal democratic characteristics, to “window dress” neoliberal operations, as she, for instance, frames the US empowered democratization of Iraq<sup>101</sup> Neoliberalism’s ability to disguise its rationality and governmentality, by using the rhetoric of other ideologies is apparent in the production of the WCSI-narrative, especially the nonprofit WCSI-narrative, where the public participation narrative is a clear example of this. The public participation narrative uses the rhetoric of liberal democracy, the power of the public voice and elections, to legitimize a technology narrative that serves as a neoliberal solution functioning solely within the market realm. However, while Brown speaks of this cloaking function, as a tactic that the political institutions in the US have used deliberately, it can be questioned whether a nonprofit organization like *The Climate Reality Project* is aware of its homogeneous support for market-based solutions, which turn out to be disguised in a strong public participation narrative. To point to another example, the spaceship metaphor deployed in the beginning of the *Chevrolet* commercial could be seen as an attempt to cloak the WCSI-narrative with environmentalism, because of the allusion to environmentalist rhetoric. Thus trying to render the commercial as a materialization of environmentalist ideology, rather than neoliberal.

Lastly, the overly optimistic perspective of the WCSI-narrative is a characteristic of its manifestation of neoliberalism. Laurent Berlant has attempted to theorize a specific type of optimism in relation to neoliberalism. Berlant coined the term “cruel optimism” in order to explain a tendency for irrational human attachment in the neoliberal condition of the postmodern. An attachment to a,

[...] object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility [but] actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Brown, mentions “window dressing” on p.50 and discusses the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq on pp. 47-48.

<sup>102</sup> Laurent Bernant, *Cruel Optimism*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2011, p. 2.

Berlant points to a type of confirming optimistic attachment, presented as rational by neoliberalism, although producing a threat for the subject, which it is aware of. This attachment turns out not to fulfill the wishes of the subject, and moreover renders them impossible to fulfill.

This seems to correspond with the attachment of subjects to the fossil-fuel orientated societies of the contemporary, although being aware of the threat of climate change. Then, is it possible to see the attachment of subjects to the WCSI-narrative within contemporary discourse on climate change as cruel optimism? At the least, this apparent shift from climate change denial narratives to a narrative addressing the reality of climate change is argued in this paper to maintain the misrepresentation of climate change in the public discussion. Individual attachment to the WCSI-narrative is supplied with a confirmation of a better world, with sustained energy and human well-being, however, this projection of the future fails to consider the chronic and uncertain nature of climate change. And the likelihood of the impact of climate change to become worse, than the average predictions depict, can be thought to increase with a human population forming an attachment to an unreliable presentation of ways to acquire this “better future.” The *IDEO* MMI wants to “explor[e] possible solutions, in an optimistic and real world way [...] [without] doom and gloom [...] [without] political agenda.” But this optimism – this “real world way” – is a political agenda, a materialization of neoliberal ideology.

With neoliberalism as humanity’s main provisions for the difficult journey into a future threatened by increasing climatic changes, there is not much reason for optimism – considering Naomi Klein’s analysis of the situation:

Climate change is a message, one that is telling us that many of our culture’s most cherished ideas are no longer viable. These are profoundly challenging revelations for all of us raised on Enlightenment ideals of progress, unaccustomed to having our ambitions confined by natural boundaries. [...] [R]eal climate solutions are ones that steer these interventions to systematically disperse and devolve power [but] arriving at these new systems is going to require shredding the free-market ideology.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Klein, p. 14.

In regard to this all, the WCSI-narrative should be considered as a response to the, ever strengthening, scientific consensus on climate change, although not primarily as a mean to achieve and preserve global well-being, but rather as a measure to maintain the production of neoliberal ideology.

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